AMERICAN FASCISTS

THE CHRISTIAN RIGHT AND THE WAR ON AMERICA

CHRIS HEDGES

Author of *Losing Moses on the Freeway*

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writer,

generous

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For Chris Marquis, a gifted

a courageous reporter

and a

friend whose loss has left a

in my *heart.*

they

Men never do evil so completely and cheerfully as when

do it from religious conviction.

-Blaise Pascal

Traditionalism

Greek

syncretistic.

practice;"

contains

Eternal Fascism: Fourteen Ways

of Looking at a Blackshirt

By Umberto Eco

In spite of some fuzziness regarding the difference between various historical forms of fascism, I think it is possible to outline a list of features that are typical of what I would like to call Ur-Fascism. or Eternal Fascism.

These features cannot be organized into a system; many of them contradict each other.

and are also typical of other kinds of despotism or fanaticism.

But it is enough that one of them be present to allow fascism to coagulate around it.

1. The first feature of Ur-Fascism is the cult of tradition.

is of course much older than fascism. Not only

was it typical of counterrevolutionary Catholic thought after the French revolution. but is was born in the late Hellenistic era, as a reaction (0 classical

rationalism. In the Medi-

terranean basin, people of different religions (most of the faiths indulgently accepted by the Roman pantheon) started dreaming of a revelation received at the dawn of human history. This revelation, according to the traditionalist mystique, had remained for a long time concealed under the veil of forgotten languages-in Egyptian hieroglyphs. in the Celtic runes. in the scrolls of the little-known religions of Asia.

This new culture had to be

Syncretism is not only.

as the dictionary says, "the combination ofdifferent forms ofhe-lief or

such a combination must tolerate contradic-

tions. Each of the original messages

a sliver ofwisdom.

and although they seem to say different or incompatible things.

they all are nevertheless alluding, allegorically. to the same primeval truth.

If

rejection

modernism.

Nazism

Boden).

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As a consequence, there can be no advancement of leaming. Truth already has been spelled out once and for all, and we can only keep interpreting its obscure message.

you browse in the shelves that, in American bookstores, are labeled New Age, you can find there even Saint Augustine, who, as far as I know, was not a fascist. But combining Saint Augustine and Stonehenge-that is a symptom ofUr-Fascism.

2. Traditionalism implies the

of

Both

Fascists and Nazis worshipped technology, while traditionalist thinkers usually reject it as a negation of traditional spiritual values. However, even

though

was proud of its indus-

trial achievements, its praise of modernism was only the surface of an ideology based upon blood and earth *(Blut und* The rejection of the modern world was disguised as a rebuttal of the capitalistic way of life. The Enlightenment, the Age of Reason, is seen as the beginning of modem depravity.

In this sense Ur-Fascism can be defined as

3. Irrationalism also depends on the cult of

for ac-

Action being beautiful in itself, it must be taken before, or without, reflection. Thinking is a form of emasculation. Therefore culture is suspect insofar as it is identified with critical attitudes. Distrust of the intellectual world has always been a symptom of Dr-Fascism, from Hermann Goering's fondness for a phrase from a Hanns Johst play ("When I hear the word 'culture' I reach for my gun") to the frequent use of such expressions as "degenerate intellectuals," "egg-heads," "effete snobs," and "universities are nests of reds."

The official Fascist intellectuals were mainly engaged in attacking modern culture and the liberal intelligentsia for ing betrayed traditional values.

4. The critical spirit makes distinctions, and to distinguish is a sign of modernism. In modem culture the scien-

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enemies.

tific community praises disagreement as a way to improve knowledge. For Ur-Fascism, *disagreement*

treason.

5. Besides, disagreement is a sign of diversity. Ur-Fascism grows up and seeks consensus by exploiting and exacerbating the natural *fear ofdifference.* The

appeal of a fascist or pre-

maturely fascist movement is an appeal against the intruders.

Thus Ur-Fascism is racist by definition.

6. Ur-Fascism derives from individual or social frustration. That is why one of the most typical features of the historical fascism was the *appeal to a frustrated class,* a class

suffering from an economic crisis or feelings of political humiliation, and frightened by the pressure of lower social groups. In our time, when the old

"proletarians" are becoming petty bourgeois (and the lumpen are largely excluded from the political scene), the fascism of tomorrow will find its audience in this new majority.

7. To people who feel deprived of a clear social identity.

Ur-Fascism says that their only privilege is the most common one, to be born in the

country. This is the ori-

gin of nationalism. Besides, the only ones who can provide an identity to the nation are its enemies. Thus at the root of the Ur-Fascist psychology there is the *obsession with a plot,* possibly an international one. The followers must feel besieged. The easiest way to solve the plot is the appeal to xenophobia. But the plot must also come from the inside: Jews are usually the best target because they have the advantage of being at the same time inside and outside. In the United States, a prominent instance of the plot obsession is to be found in Pat Robertson's *The New World*

but, as we have recently

seen, there are many others.

8. The followers must feel

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of Ur-Fascism

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Ur-Fascism

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hero.

taught to think of Englishmen as the

people. They

ate more frequently than the poor but sober Italians. Jews are rich and help each other through a secret web of mutual tance. However, the followers

must also be

vinced that they can overwhelm the enemies. Thus, by a continuous shifting of rhetorical focus, the enemies are at the same time too strong and too weak. Fascist governments are condemned to lose wars because they are constitutionally incapable of objectively evaluating the force of the enemy.

9. For Ur-Fascism there is no struggle for life but, rather, life is lived for struggle. Thus

trafficking with the

enemy. It is bad because *life*

warfare. This, however,

brings about an Armageddon complex. Since enemies have to be defeated, there must be a final battle, after which the movement will have control of the world. But such solu-tions" implies a funher era of peace, a Golden Age, which contradicts the principle of pennanent war. No fascist leader has ever succeeded in solving this predicament.

10. Elitism is a typical

of any reactionary ideology,

insofar as it is fundamentally

and aristocratic

and militaristic elitism cruelly implies

for

can only advocate a popular elitism. Every citizen belongs to the best people in the world, the members or the party are the best among the citizens, every citizen can (or ought to)

a member of the party. But there cannot be

patricians without plebeians. In fact, the Leader, knowing that his power was not delegated to him democratically but was conquered by force, also knows that his force is based upon the weakness of the masses; they are so weak as to need and deserve a ruler.

11. In such a perspective

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In every mythology the hero is an exceptional being, but

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will

sexual

matters.

citizens

in Ur-Fascist ideology heroism is the nonn. This cult of heroism is strictly linked with the cult of death. It is not by chance that a motto of the Spanish Falangists was *Viva la Muerte* ("Long Live Death!"). In nonfascist societies, the lay public is (old that death is unpleasant but must be faced with dignity; believers are told that it is the painful way to reach a supernatural happiness. By contrast, the lir-Fascist hero craves heroic death. advertised as the best reward for a heroic life. The Ur-Fascist hero is impatient to die. In his impatience. he more frequently sends other people to death.

12. Since both permanent war and heroism are difficult games to play.

Ur-Fascist

his

to *power* to

This is the origin of machismo (which implies

both disdain for women and intolerance and condemnation of nonstandard sexual habits. from chastity to homosexuality).

Since even sex is a difficult game to play. the Ur-Fascist hero tends to play with weapons-doing so becomes an ersatz phallic exercise.

13. lit-Fascism is based upon a *selective populism.* a qualitative populism, one might say. In a democracy. the have individual rights. but the citizens in their entirety have a political impact only from a quantitative point of view-one follows the decisions of the majority. For Ur-Fascism. however, individuals as individuals have no rights, and the People is conceived as a quality. a monolithic entity expressing the Common Will. Since no large quantity of human beings can have a common will, the Leader pretends to be their interpreter. Having lost their power of delegation. citizens do not act; they are only called on to play the role of the People. thus the People is only a theatrical fiction. There is in our future a TV or Internet populism. in which the emotional response of a selected group of citizens can be presented and accepted as the Voice of the People.

speaks

Newspeak.

Nineteen

Ur-Fas-

take

Auschwitz,

recalling:

Because of its qualitative populism, Ur-Fascism must be *against "rotten" parliamentary governments.* Wherever a politician casts doubt on the legitimacy of a parliament because it no longer represents the Voice of the People, we can smell Ur-Fascism.

14. Ur-Fascism

Newspeak was invented by

Orwell, in

Eighty-Four, as the official language of what he called Ingsoc, English Socialism. But elements of cism are common to different forms of dictatorship. All the Nazi or Fascist schoolbooks made use of an impoverished vocabulary, and an elementary syntax, in order to limit the instruments for complex and critical reasoning. But we must be ready to identify other kinds of Newspeak. even if they the apparently innocent form of a popular talk show.

Ur-Fascism is still around us, sometimes in plainclothes. It would be so much easier for us if there appeared on the world scene somebody saying, "I want to reopen

I want

the Blackshins to parade again in the Italian squares." Life is not that simple. Ur-Fascism can come back under the most innocent of disguises. Our duty is to uncover it and to point our finger at any of its new instances- every day, in every part of the world. Franklin Roosevelt's words of November 4, 1938, are worth

"If American democracy ceases to move for-

ward as a living force, seeking day and night by peaceful means to better the lot of our citizens, fascism will grow in strength in our land." Freedom and liberation are an unending task.

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CHAPTER ONE

Faith

Unlimited tolerance must lead to the disappearance of tolerance. If we extend unlimited tolerance even to those who intolerant, if we are not prepared to defend a tolerant society against the onslaught of the intolerant, then the tolerant will be destroyed, and tolerance with them. In this formulation, I do not imply, for instance, that we should always suppress the utterance of intolerant philosophies; as long as we can counter them by rational argument and keep them in

by public

opinion, suppression would certainly be most unwise. But we should claim the right to suppress them if necessary even by force; for it may easily turn OUt that they

not prepared to

meet us on the level of rational argument, but begin by nouncing all argument; they may forbid their followers to listen to rational argument,

it is deceptive, and teach them to

answer arguments by the use of their fists or pistols. We should therefore claim, in the name of tolerance, the right not to tolerate the intolerant. We should claim that any movement preaching intolerance places itself outside the law, and we should consider incitement to intolerance and persecution

as criminal, in the same way as we should consider incitement to murder, or to kidnapping, or to the revival of the slave trade, as criminal.

-*Karl Popper,* The Open Society and Its Enemies'

Dgrewupin asmall farming town in upstate NewYorkwhere my life, and the life ofmy family, centered on the Presbyterian I prayed and sang hymns every Sunday, went to Bible school, listened to my father preach the weekly sennon and attended seminary at Harvard Divinity School to be a preacher self. America was a place where things could be better if we

human

certainly

bar

stand

Vietnam

worked to make them better, and where our faith saved us from despair, self-righteousness and the dangerous belief that we knew the will of God or could carry it out. We were taught that those who claimed to speak for God, the self-apPointed prophets who promised the Kingdom of God on earth, were dangerous. We had no ability to understand God's will. We did the best we could. We trusted and had faith in the mystery, the unknown before us. We made decisions-even decisions that on the outside looked unob-jectionably moral-well aware of the numerous motives, some good and some bad. that went into every

act. In the end, we

all stood in need of forgiveness. We were all tainted by sin. None were pure. The Bible *was* not the literal word of God. It was not a self-help manual

that could predict the future. It did not tell us how to vote or allow us to divide the world into us and them, the righteous and the damned, the infidels and the blessed. It was a book written by a series of ancient writers,

fallible and at

times at odds with each other, who asked the right questions and struggled with the mystery and transcendence of human existence.

We took the Bible seriously and therefore could not take it literally.

There was no alcohol in the manse where I grew up. Indeed, my father railed against the Glass Bar, the one

in town, and

the drinking in the VFW Hall. We did not work on Sunday. I never heard my father swear. But coupled with this piety was a belief that as Christians we were called to fight for justice. My father took an early

in the town in support of the civil-rights

movement, a position that was highly unpopular in rural, white enclaves where Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was one of the most hated men in America. A veteran of World War II, he opposed the War, telling me when I was about 12 that if the war was still being waged when I was 18, he would go to prison with me.

To this day I carry in my head the rather gloomy image of sitting in a jail cell with my dad. Finally, because his youngest brother was gay, he understood the pain and isolation of being a gay man in America. He worked later in life in the gay-rights movement,

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calling for the ordination and marriage of gays. When he found that my college, Colgate University, had no gay and lesbian ization, he brought gay speakers to the campus. The meetings led gays and lesbians to confide in him that they felt uncomfortable coming out of the closet to start an open organization, a problem my father swiftly solved by taking me out to lunch and informing me that although I was not gay, I had to form the organization.

When I went into the dining hall for breakfast, lunch and dinner, the checker behind the desk would take my card, mark off the appropriate box, and hand it back, muttering, "Faggot." This willingness to take a moral stand, to accept risk and ridicule, was, he showed me, the cost of the moral life.

The four Gospels, we understood, were filled with factual contradictions, two Gospels saying Jesus was baptized by John the Baptist, while Luke asserted that John was already in prison. Mark and John give little imponance to the birth of Jesus, while Matthew and Luke give differing accounts. There are three rate and different versions of the 10 Commandments (Exodus 20, Exodus 34, and Deuteronomy 5). As for the question of God's true nature, there are many substantive contradictions. Is God a loving or a vengeful God? In some sections of the Bible, vidous acts of vengeance, including the genocidal extermination of posing tribes and nations, appear to be blessed by God. God turns on the Egyptians and transforms the Nile into blood so the tians will suffer from thirst-and then sends swarms of locusts and flies to torture them, along with hail, fire and thunder from the heavens to destroy all plants and trees. To liberate the children of Israel, God orders the firstborn in every Egyptian hold killed so all will know "that the Lord makes a distinction between the Egyptians and Israel" (Exodus 11:7).1 The killing does not cease until "there was not a

house where one was not dead" (Exodus 12:30). Amid the carnage God orders Moses to loot all the clothing, jewelry, gold and silver from the Egyptian homes (Exodus 12:35-36). God looks at the devastation and says, 4

AMERICAN FASCISTS

"I have made span of the Egyptians" (Exodus 10:2). While the Exodus story fueled the hopes and dreams of oppressed Jews, and later African Americans in the bondage of slavery, it also has been used to foster religious chauvinism.

A literal reading of the Bible means reinstitution of slavery coupled with the understanding that the sIavemaster has the right to beat his slave without mercy since "the slave is his money"

(Exodus 21:21). Children who strike or curse a parent are to be executed (Exodus 21:15, 17). Those who pay homage to another god "shall be utterly destroyed" (Exodus 22:20). Menstruating women are to be considered unclean, and aU they touch while menstruating becomes unclean (Leviticus 15:19-32). The blind, the lame, those with mutilated faces, those who are hunchbacks or dwarfs and those with itching diseases or scabs or crushed testicles cannot become priests (Leviticus 21:17-21). Blasphemers shall be executed (Leviticus 24:16). And "if the spirit of jealousy"

comes upon a man, the high priest can order the jealous man's wife to drink the "water of bitterness." If she dies, it is proof of her guilt; if she survives, of her innocence (Numbers 5:11-31).

Women, throughout the Bible, are subservient to men, often without legal rights, and men are free to sell their daughters into sexual bondage (Exodus 21:7-11).

Hatred ofJews and other non-Christians pervades the Gospel ofJohn (3:18-20). Jews, he wrote, are children of the devil, the father of lies Oohn 8:39-44). Jesus calls on his followers to love their enemies and to pray for their persecutors (Matthew 5:44), a radical concept in the days of the Roman

Empire. He says we must never demean or insult our enemies. But then we read of Jesus calling his enemies "a brood of vipers" (Matthew 12:34).

The Book of Revelation, a crucial text for the radical Christian Right, appears to show Christ returning to earth at the head of an avenging army. It is one of the few places in the Bible where Christ is associated. with violence. This bizarre book, omitted from some of the early canons and relegated to the back of the Bible by Manin

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(Revelation

Faith

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Luther, may have been a way, as scholars contend, for the early Christians to cope with Roman persecution and their dreams of final triumph and glory. The book, however, paints a picture of a bloody battle between the forces of good and evil, Christ and the Antichrist, God and Satan, and the torment and utter destruction of all who do not follow the faith. In this vision, only the faithful will be allowed to enter the gates of the New Jerusalem. All others will disappear, cast into the lake offire (Revelation 20:14-15). The Warrior's defeat of the armies of the nations, a vast apoc.alyptic vision of war, ends with birds of prey invited. to "gather for the great supper of God, to eat the flesh of kings, the flesh of captains, the flesh of mighty men, the flesh of horses and their riders, and the flesh of all men, both free and slave, both small and great" (Revelation 19:17-18). It is a story of God's ruthless, terrifying and violent power unleashed. on nonbelievers:

The fourth angel poured his

on the sun,

it *was allowed*

to

with fire;

were scorched by the

heat, and

they cursed the name of God, who had power over and they did not

and give him glory. The fifth angel

his bowl

the throne of the beast,

its

was in dark-

ness;

gnawed

in anguish

cursed the God of

for their pain

sores,

did not repent of their

16:8-11)

There is enough hatred., bigotry and lust for violence in the pages of the Bible to satisfy anyone bent on justifying cruelty and violence. Religion, as H. Richard Niebuhr said, is a good thing for good people and a bad thing

for bad people.l And the Bible has long been used. in the wrong hands-such as antebellum slave owners in the American South who quoted from it to defend slavery-not to Christianize the culture, as those wielding it often claim, but to acculturate the Christian faith.

Many of the suppositions of the biblical writers, who under-

reject

rest.[4]

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stood little about the working of the cosmos or the human body, are so fanciful, and the accounts so wild, that even biblical literalists

them. God is not, as many writers of the Bible believed, peering down at us through little peepholes in the sky called stars. These evangelicals and fundamentalists are, as the Reverend William Sloane Coffin wrote, not biblical literalists, as they claim. but "selective literalists," choosing the bits and pieces of the Bible that conform to their ideology and ignoring. distorting or inventing the

And the selective literalists

have it

both ways. Either the Bible is literally true and all of its edicts must be obeyed. or it must be read in another way.

Mainstream Christians can also cherry-pick the Bible to create a Jesus and God who are always loving and compassionate. Such Christians often fail to acknowledge that there are hateful passages in the Bible that give sacred authority to the rage. self-aggrandizement and intolerance of the Christian Right. Church leaders must denounce the biblical passages that champion apocalyptic violence and hateful political creeds. They must do so in the light of other biblical passages that teach a compassion and tolerance, often exemplified in the life of Christ. which stands opposed to bigotry and violence. Until this happens. until the Christian churches wade intO the debate, these biblical passages will be used by bigots and despots to give sacred authority to their calls to subjugate or eradicate the enemies of God. This literature in the biblical canon keeps alive the virus of hatred, whether mant or active. and the possibility of apocalyptic terror in the name of God. And the steady refusal by churches to challenge the canonical authority of these passages means these churches share some of the blame. "Unless the churches, Protestant and Catholic alike. come together on this, they will continue to make it legitimate to believe in the end as a time when there will be no non-Christians or infidels," theologian Richard Fenn wrote. "Silent complicity with apocalyptic rhetoric soon becomes collusion with plans for religiously inspired genocide:'

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Faith

7

As long as scripture, blessed and accepted by the church, teaches that at the end of time there will be a Day of Wrath and Christians will control the shattered remnants of a world cleansed through violence and war, as long as it teaches that all nonbelievers will be tormented, destroyed and banished to hell, it will be hard to thwart the message of radical apocalyptic preachers or assuage the fears of the Islamic world that Christians are calling for its annihilation. Those who embrace this dark conclusion to life can find it

endorsed in scripture, whether it is tucked into the pew rack of a liberal Unitarian church in Boston or a megachurch in Florida. The mainstream Protestant and Catholic churches, declining in numbers and influence, cannot hope to combat the hysteria and excitement roused by these prophets of doom until they repudiate the apocalyptic writings in scripture.

The writers of Genesis, as the Reverend William Sloane Coffin has pointed out, who wrote about the creation of the world in seven days, knew nothing about the process of creation.6 They lieved the earth was flat with water above and below it. They wrote that God created light on the first day and the sun on the fourth day. Genesis was not written to explain the process of creation, ofwhich these writers knew nothing. It was written to help explain the purpose of creation. It was written to help us grasp a spiritual truth, not a scientific or historical fact. And this purpose, this spiritual truth, is something the writers did know about.

These biblical writers, at their best, understood our divided natures. They knew our internal conflicts and battles; how we could love our brother and yet hate him; the oppressive power of parents, even the best of parents; the impulses that drive us to commit violations against others; the yearning to lead a life of meaning; our fear of mortality; our struggles to deal with our uncertainty, our loneliness, our greed, our lust, our ambition, our desires to be God, as well as our moments of nobility, compassion and courage. They knew these emotions and feelings were g1ed. They understood our weaknesses and strengths. They un-8

derstood how we are often not the people we want to be or know we should be, how hard it is for us to aniculate all this, and how nfe and creation can be as glorious and beautiful as it can be mysterious, evil and cruel. This is why Genesis is worth reading, indeed why the Bible stands as one of the great ethical and moral documents of our age. The biblical writers have helped shape and define Western civilization. Not to know the Bible is, in some ways, to be illiterate, to neglect the very roots of philosophy, art, architecture, literature, poetry and music. It is to fall into a dangerous provincialism, as myopic and narrow as that embraced by those who say everything in the Bible is literally true and we do not need any other kind of

intellectual or scientific inquiry. Doubt and belief are not, as biblical literalists claim, incompatible. Those who act without any doubt are frightening.

"There lives more faith in honest doubt," the poet Alfred Tennyson noted, "believe me, than in half the creeds." 7

This was my faith. It is a pretty good summary of my faith today. God is inscrutable, mysterious and unknowable. We do not understand what life is about, what it means, why we are here and what will happen to us after our brief sojourn on the planet ends. We are saved, in the end, by faith-faith that life is not meaningless and random, that there is a purpose to human existence, and that in the midst of this morally neutral universe the tiny, seemingly insignificant acts of compassion and blind human kindness, especially to those labeled our enemies and strangers, sustain the divine spark, which is love. We are not fully human if we live alone. These small acts of compassion-for they can never be organized and institutionalized as can hate-have a power that lives after us. Human kindness is deeply subversive to totalitarian creeds, which seek to thwart all compassion toward those deemed unwonhy of moral consideration, those branded as internal or external enemies. These acts recognize and affirm the humanity of others, others who may be condemned as agents of Satan. Those who sacrifice for others, especially at great cost, who place com-

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passion and tolerance above ideology and creeds, and who reject absolutes, especially moral absolutes, stand as constant witnesses in our lives to this

love, even long after *they* are gone. In the gospels this is called resurrection.

Faith presupposes that we cannot know. We can never know.

Those who claim to know what life means play God. These false prophets-the Pat Robertsons, the Jerry Falwells and the James Dobsons-clutching the cross and the Bible, offer, like topheles, to lead us back to a mythical paradise and an impossible, unachievable happiness and security, at once seductive and empowering. They ask us to hand over moral choice and responsibility to them. They will tell us they know what is right and wrong in the eyes of God. They tell us how to

how to live, and

in this process they elevate themselves above us. They remove the anxiety of moral choice, the fundamental anxiety of human existence. This is part of their attraction. They give us the rules by which we live. But once we hand over this anxiety and accept their authority, we become enslaved and they become our idols.

And idols, as the Bible never ceases to tell us, destroy us.

I have seen enough of the world over the

two decades-

for although I graduated from seminary I was not ordained, and instead worked in Latin America, Africa, the Middle East and the Balkans as a foreign correspondent-to grasp that men and women of great moral probity and courage arise in all cultures, all nations and all religions to challenge the oppressor and fight for the oppressed. I also saw how the dominant religions of these nations were often twisted and distorted by totalitarian movements, turned into civic religions in which the goals of the movement or the state became the goals of the divine. The wars I covered were often fought in the name of one God or another. Armed groups, from Hamas in the West Bank and Gaza Strip to the Serbian tionalists in the former Yugoslavia, were fueled by apocalyptic visions that sanctified terrorism or genocide. They mocked the faiths they purported to defend.

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AMERICAN FASCISTS

America and the Christian religions have no monopoly on goodness or saintliness. God has not chosen Americans as a pe0-ple above others. The beliefs of Christians are as flawed and im-as all religious beliefs. But both the best of American democracy and the best of Christianity embody

values,

values such as compassion, tolerance and belief in justice and equality. America is a nation where all have a

in how we live

and how we are governed. We have never fully adhered to these values-indeed. probably never will-but our health as a country is determined by our steadfastness in striving to attain them. And there are times when taking a moral stance, perhaps the highest form of patriotism. means facing down the community, even the nation. Our loyalty to our community and our nation. Reinhold Niebuhr wrote.

therefore morally tolerable only if it includes

values wider than those of the

These values, democratic and Christian, are being dismanded, often with stealth, by a radical Christian movement, known as minionism, which seeks to cloak itself in the mantle of the tian faith and American patriotism. Dominionism takes its name from Genesis

in which God gives human beings

ion" over all creation. This movement, small in number but ential, depans from traditional evangelicalism. Dominionists now control at least six national television networks, each reaching tens of millions of homes, and virtually all of the nation's more than 2,000 religious radio stations, as well as denominations such as the Southern Baptist Convention. Dominionism seeks to redefine traditional democratic and Christian terms and concepts to fit an ideology that calls on the radical church

take political power.

It shares many prominent features with classical fascist movements, at least as it is defined by the scholar Robert O. Paxton, who sees fascism as "a form of political behavior marked by sessive

with community decline, humiliation, or

victimhood and by compensatory cultures of unity, energy, and purity, in which a mass-based pany of committed nationalist mil-

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itants, working in uneasy but effective collaboration with tional elites, abandons democratic liberties and pursues with re-demptive violence and without ethical or legal restraints goals of internal cleansing and external expansion."9

Dominionism, born out of a theology known as Christian constructionism, seeks to politicize faith. It has, like all fascist movements, a belief in magic along with leadership adoration and a strident call for moral and physical supremacy of a master race, in this case American Christians. It also has, like fascist movements, an illMdefined and shifting set of beliefs, some of which contradict one another. Paxton argues that the best way to stand authentic fascist movements, which he says exist in all societies, including democracies, is to focus not on what they say but on how they act, for, as he writes, some of the ideas that underlie fascist movements "remain unstated

and implicit in fascist public language," and "many of them belong more to the realm of ceral feelings than to the realm of reasoned propositions."

"Fascism is ... a kind of colonization," the Reverend son Loehr noted.

simple definition of 'colonization' is that it

takes people's stories away, and assigns them supportive roles stories that empower others at their expense." The dominionist movement, like all totalitarian movements, seeks to appropriate not only our religious and patriotic language but also our stories, to deny the validity of stories other than their own, to deny that there are other acceptable ways of living and being. There becomes, in their rhetoric, only one way to be a Christian and only one way to be an American.

Dominionism is a theocratic sect with its roots in a radical Calvinism. It looks to the theocracy John Calvin implanted in Geneva, Switzerland, in the I500s as its political model. It teaches that American Christians have been mandated by God to make America a Christian state. A decades-long refusal by most can fundamentalists to engage in politics at all following the 1925

Scopes trial has been replaced by a call for Christian "dominion"

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over the nation and eventually over the eanh itself. Dominionisrn preaches that Jesus has called on Christians to build the kingdom of God in the here

and now, whereas previously it was thought that we would have to wait for it. America becomes, in this militant biblicism. an agent of God, and all political and intellectual opponents of America's Christian leaders are viewed, quite simply. as agents of Satan. Under Christian dominion, America will be no longer a sinful and fallen nation but one in which the 10

Commandments form the basis of our legal system, creationism and "Christian values" form the basis of our educational system.

and the media and the government proclaim the Good News (0

one and all. Labor unions, civil-rights laws and public schools will be abolished. Women will be removed from the workforce to stay at home, and an those deemed insufficiently Christian will be denied citizenship. Aside from its proselytizing mandate, the federal government win be reduced to the protection of property rights and "homeland" security. Some dominionists (not all of whom cept the label, at least not publicly) would further require all citizens to pay "tithes" to church organizations empowered by the government to run our social-welfare agencies and all schools.

The only legitimate voices in this state will be Christian. All others will be silenced.

The racist and brutal intolerance of the intellectual godfathers of today's Christian Reconstructionism is a chilling reminder of the movement's lust for repression. *The Institutes ofBiblical Law* by R. J. Rushdoony, written in 1973, is the most important book for the dominionist movement. Rushdoony calls for a Christian society that is harsh, unforgiving and violent. His work draws heavily on the calls for a repressive theocratic society laid out by Calvin in *of the Christian*

first published in 1536 and one of

the most important works of the Protestant Reformation. Christians are, Rushdoony argues, the new chosen people of and

are called to do what Adam and Eve failed to do: create a godly, Christian state. The Jews, who neglected to fulfill God's com-

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mands in the Hebrew scriptures, have, in this belief system, forfeited their place as God's chosen people and have been replaced by Christians. The death penalty is to be imposed not only for fenses such as rape, kidnapping and murder, but also for adultery, blasphemy, homosexuality, astrology, incest, striking a parent, corrigible juvenile delinquency, and, in the case of women, "un-chastity before marriage." The world is to be subdued and ruled by a Christian United States. Rushdoony dismissed the widely accepted estimate of 6 million Jews murdered in the Holocaust as an inflated figure, and his theories on race often echo those found in Nazi eugenics, in which there are higher and lower forms of human beings. Those considered by the Christian state to be immoral and incapable of reform are to be exterminated.11

Rushdoony was deeply antagonistic toward the federal government. He believed the federal government should concern itself with little more than national defense. Education and social fare should be handed over to the churches. Biblical law must replace the secular legal code. This ideology, made more palatable for the mainstream by later disciples such as Francis Schaeffer and Pat Robertson, remains at the heart of the movement. Many of its tenetS are being enacted through the Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives, currently channeling billions in federal funds to groups such as National Right to Ufe and Pat Robertson's Operation Blessing, as well as to innumerable Christian charities and organizations

that do everything from running drug and pregnancy clinics to promoting sexual abstinence-only programs in schools."

While traditional fundamentalism shares many of the darker traits of the new movement-such as a blind obedience to a male hierarchy that often claims to speak for God, intolerance toward nonbelievers, and disdain for rational, intellectual inquiry-it has never attempted to impose its belief system on the rest of the tion. And it has not tried to transform government, as well as all other secular institutions, into an extension of the church. The new

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radical fundamentalisms amount to a huge and disastrous mutation. Dominiornsts and their wealthy, right-wing sponsors speak in terms and phrases that are familiar and comforting to most Americans, but they no longer use words to mean what they meant in the past. They engage in a slow process of "logocide," the killing of words. The old definitions ofwords are replaced by new ones. Code words of the old belief system are deconstructed and assigned dia-metrically opposed meanings. Words such as "truth," "wisdom,"

"death," "liberty," "life," and "love" no longer mean what they mean in the secular world. "Ufe" and "death" mean life in Christ or death to Christ, and

used to signal belief or unbeliefin the risen

Lord. "Wisdom" has little to do with human wisdom but refers to the level of commitment and obedience to the system of belief.

"Liberty" is not about freedom, but the "liberty" found when one accepts Jesus Christ and is liberated from the world to obey Him.

But perhaps the most pernicious distortion comes with the word the word used to lure into the movement many who seek a warm, loving community to counter their isolation and alienation.

is distorted to mean an unquestioned obedience to those who claim to speak for God in return for the promise of everlasting life. The blind, human love, the acceptance of the other, is attacked as an inferior love, dangerous and untrustwonhy.14

"The goal *must* be God's law-order in which alone is true liberty," wrote Rushdoony in *Institutes of Biblical Law: Whenever*

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As the process gains momentum-with some justices on the Supreme Court such as Antonin Scalia steeped in this ideology-America starts to speak a new language. There is a slow and inex-orable hijacking of religious and

political tenninology. Terms such as "liberty" and "freedom" no longer mean what they meant in the past. Those in the movement speak of

but they do

not speak about the traditional concepts of American liberty-the liberty to express divergent opinions, to respect other ways of believing and being, the liberty of individuals to seek and pursue their own goals and fonns of happiness. When used by the Christian Right, the term "liberty" means the liberty that comes with accepting a very narrowly conceived Christ and the binary world·

view that acceptance promotes.

by Mark A. Beliles and Stephen K.

McDowell, published in 1989, is the standard textbook on American history used in many Christian schools. It is also a staple of the home-schooling movement. In this book, authors Beliles and McDowell define the tenn "liberty" as fealty to "the Spirit of the Lord. *n* The work of "liberty" is an ongoing process, one mounted by Christians, to free a society from the slavery imposed by lar humanists. *n* This process frees, or eradicates, different moral codes and belief systems, to introduce a single, unifonn and unquestioned "Christian" orientation. Uberty, in a linguistic twist worthy of George Orwell, means

tyranny:

Bible reveals that "where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty" (2 *Corinthians* 3:17). . . . *When the Spirit of the Lord comes into a nation, that*

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a missionary group striving to

bring "the Name of Jesus" to "every tribe and tongue and tion,"

gives dose attention to the meaning of "liberty" in their teachings. A tape of a missionary lesson plays: "I want to make you understand this word 'liberty: It is written in God's book:

'Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.' Some say there is not enough liberty in this land. but jf that is true, it is there is not enough of the Spirit of the Lord. What do you think yourselves? Do people do as God commands them? Do they love each other? Do they help each other? Do they speak the truth? Do they flee from fornication and adultery? You know there are those who steal, who lie, who kill, and who worship things that are not God. These things are not of the Spirit of God, but of the spirit of Satan. Then how can there be true liberty?"

The "infusion" of

Spirit of the Lord" into society includes

its infusion into society's legal system. Uberty is defined as the extent to which America obeys Christian law, When America is a Christian nation, liberty becomes, in this view, liberation from Satan, This slow, gradual and often imperceptible strangulation of thought-the corruption of democratic concepts and ideas-infects the society until the new, totalitarian vision is articulated by the old vocabulary. This cannibalization of language occurs subdy and stealthily. The ghoulish process leaves those leading the

movement mouthing platitudes little different from the mides spoken by those who sincerely champion the open, democratic state.

These tactics, familiar and effective, have often been used by movements that assault democracies. This seemingly innocent hijacking of language mollifies opponents, the mainstream and supponers within the movement who fail to grasp the radical

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agenda. It gives believers a sense of continuity and tradition.

ical logocides

themselves as the defenders of an idealized

and more vinuous past. Most revolutionary movements, from those in Latin America to those shaped by Islamic militancy in the Middle East, root their radical ideas in what they claim are older, purer traditions.

While the radical Christian movement's leaders pay lip service to traditional justice, they call among their own for a legal system that promotes what they define as "Christian principles. *n* The movement thus is able to preserve the appearance of law and respect for democracy even as its leaders condemn all opponents-dismissed as "atheists," "nonbelieversn or "secular humanistsn -

to moral and legal oblivion. Justice, under this process of logocide, is perverted to carry out injustice and becomes a mirage of law and order. The

moral calculus no longer revolves around the concept of universal human rights; now its center is the well-being, protection and promotion of "Bible-believing Christians."

Logocide slowly and stealthily removes whole segments of society from the moral map. As Joseph Goebbels wrote: "The best propaganda is that which, as it were, works invisibly, penetrates the whole of life without the public having any knowledge of the propagandistic initiative. *n*

Vietor Klemperer, who was dismissed from his post as a professor of Romance languages at the University of Dresden in 1935

because of his Jewish ancestry, wrote what may have been the first literary critique of National Socialism. He noted that the Nazis also "changed the values, the frequency of words, [and]

made them into common property, words that had previously been used by individuals or tiny troupes. They confiscated words for the party, saturated words and phrases and sentence forms with their poison. They made language serve their terrible system. They conquered words and made them into their strongest advertising tools *[Werebemittel],* at once the most public and the most secret."

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And while all this took place, he points out, most Germans never noticed.

"The language and symbols of an authentic American fascism would, of course, have little to do with the original European models," Robert 0. Paxton wrote in *Anatomy of They would have to be as*

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There are at least 70 million evangelicals in the United States-about 25 percent of the population-attending more than 200,000

evangelical churches. Polls indicate that about 40

of re-

spondents believe in the Bible as the "actual word of God" and that it is "to be taken literally, word for word." Applied to the country's total population, this proportion would place the number of believers at about 100 million. These polls also suggest that about 84 percent of Americans accept that Jesus is the son of God; 80 percent of respondents say that they believe they will stand fore God on the Day ofJudgment. The same percentage of respondents say God works miracles, and half say they think angels Almost a third of all respondents say they believe in the Rapture.21

American fundamentalists and evangelicals, however, are sharply divided between strict fundamentalists-those who refuse to grant legitimacy to alternative views of the Christian tradition-and the many evangelicals who concede that there are other legitimate ways to worship and serve Christ. Evangelicals, while

they often embrace fundamentalist doctrine, do not always share the intolerance of the radical fundamentalists. While a majority of Christian Americans embrace a literal interpretation of the Bible, only a tiny minority-among them the Christian dominionists-are comfortable with this darker vision of an intolerant, theocratic America. Unfortunately, it is this

minority that is taking over the machinery of U.S. state and religious institutions.

In a 2004 study, the political scientist John Green identifies those he calls "traditional evangelicals." This group, which Green estimates at 12.6 percent of the population, comes "closest to the

'religious right' widely discussed in the media." It is overwhelmingly Republican; it is openly hostile to democratic pluralism, and it champions totalitarian policies, such as denying homosexuals the same rights as other Americans and amending the Constitution to make America a "Christian nation." Green's "traditional evangelicals" can probably be called true dominionists. There are signs that this militant core may be smaller than even Green suggests, dipping to around 7 percent of the population in other polls, such as those conducted by George Barna. But the potency of this radical movement far exceeds its numbers. Radical social movements, as Crane Brinton wrote in *The*

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are almost always tiny, although they use the tools of modern propaganda to create the illusion of a mass following. As Brinton noted, "the impressive demonstrations the camera has recorded in Germany, Italy, Russia and China ought not to deceive the careful student of politics. Neither Communist, Nazi, nor Fascist victory over the moderates was achieved by the participation of the many; all were achieved by small, disciplined, principled, fanatical bodies."2< These radicals, Brinton went on, "combine, in varying degrees, very high ideals and a complete contempt for the inhibitions and principles which serve most other men as ideals." They are, he said, "practical men unfettered by common sense, Machi-avellians in the service of the Beautiful and the Good."2s And once they are in power, "there is no more finicky regard for the liberties

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of the individual or for the forms of legality. The extremists, after clamoring for libeny and toleration while they were in opposition, tum very authoritarian when they reach

Traditional evangelicals. those who come out of Billy Graham's mold. are not necessarily comfortable with the direction taken by the dominionists. And the multitude of churches.

denominations and groups that do lend their support in varying degrees to this new movement are diverse and often antagonistic.

While right-wing Catholics have joined forces with the movement, many of the movement's Protestant leaders, including D.

James Kennedy, disdainfully label the Catholic Church a "cult."21

These variances are held in check by the shared drive for political control, but the disputes simmer beneath

surface, threatening

to tear apan the fragile coalitions. And those few evangelicals who challenge the dominionist drive for power are ruthlessly thrust aside, as the purges of the old guard within the Southern Baptist Convention three decades ago illustrate.

It is difficult to write in broad sweeps about this mass ment and detail these conflicts,

there are innumerable differ-

ences not only among

but among believers. In the

megachurches, there are worshippers and preachers who focus exclusively on the gospel of prosperity-centered on the belief that God wants Christians to be rich and successful-and who have de interest in politics. There are strict fundamentalists who view charismatics-those who speak in tongues-as Satan worshippers.

There are small dusters of left-wing evangelicals, such as Jim Wallis's Sojourner movement and Ron Sider's Evangelicals for cial Action, who believe the Bible to be the literal word of God but embrace social activism and left-wing politics. There are cals who focus more on what they can do in their communities as Christians than on what God's army can do to change the course of American history. And there are old-style evangelists, such as Luis Palau, who still tell Christians to keep their hands dean ofpolitics, get right with Jesus and focus on spiritual and moral renewal.

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But within this mass of divergent, fractious and varied groups is this core group of powerful Christian dominionists who have latched on to the despair, isolation,

and fear

that drives many people into these churches. Christian dominionist leaders have harnessed these discontents to

a frighten-

ing political agenda. If they do not have the active support of all in the evangelical churches, they often have

sympathy. They

can count on the passive support of huge numbers of Christians, even if many of these Christians may not fully share dominionism's fierce utopian vision, fanaticism or ruthlessness. The appeal of the movement lies in the high ideals its radicals preach, the promise of a moral, Christian nation, the promise of a renewal. Its darker aims-seen in calls for widespread repression of nonbelievers; frequent use of the death penalty; illegalization of abortion, even in case of rape and incest; and the dismantling of public education-will, if achieved, alienate many who support them.

But this combination of a disciplined, well-financed radical core and tens of millions of Americans who, discontent and anxious, yearn for a vague, revitalized "Christian nation," is a potent new force in American politics. Dominionists wait only for a fiscal, cial or political crisis, a moment of upheaval in the form of an nomic meltdown or another terrorist strike on American soil, to move to reconfigure the political system. Such a crisis could unleash a public clamor for drastic new national

measures

and draconian reforms to safeguard the nation. Widespread discontent and fear, stoked and manipulated by dominionists and their sympathizers, could be used by these radicals to sweep aside the objections of beleaguered moderates in Congress and the courts, those clinging to a bankrupt and discredited liberalism, to establish an American theocracy, a Christian fascism.

The movement has sanctified a ruthless unfettered capitalism.

In an essay in

titled "The Spirit of Disobedi-

ence: An Invitation to Resistance," Curtis White argued that is

capitalism that now most defines our national character, not

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Christianity or the Enlightenment." Although the values of capitalism are antithetical to Christ's vision and the Enlightenment ethic of Kant, the gospel of prosperity-which preaches that Jesus wants us aU to be rich and powerful and the government to get out of the way-has formulated a belief system that delights corporate America. Corporations such as

Foods-which has

placed 128 part-time chaplains. nearly all evangelicals or fundamentalists, in 78 plants across the country-along with Purdue, Wal-Mart, and Sam's Wholesale, to name a few. are huge financial backers of the movement.

White concludes that "ours is a culture in which death has taken refuge in a legality that is supported by both reasonable liberals and Christian conservatives." This "legality" makes the tematic exploitation of human workers-paying less than living wages, while failing to provide adequate health care and ment plans-simply a

of our heritage of freedom." White

goes on to excoriate our nationalist triumphalism and our leashing of "the most fantaStically destructive military the

world has ever known in the course of "protecting and pursuing freedom." Among the resultant diseases of culture, he lists the

"grotesque violence of video games and Hollywood movies," the

"legality of abortions [which] at times covers over an attitude toward human life that subjects life to the low logic of efficiency and convenience," meaningless work, mindless consumerism, a distoned sense of time, housing developments where houses are

"coffins" and neighborhoods are "shared cemeteries" and, haps most destructively, the legality of property rights [which]

condemns nature itself to annihilation even as we call it the freedom to pursue personal property.

The power brokers in the radical Christian Right have already moved from the fringes of society to the executive branch, the House of Representatives, the Senate and the couns. The movement has seized control of the Republican Party. Christian mentalists now hold a majority of seats in 36 percent of all

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Republican Party state committees, or 18 of 50 states, along with large minorities in the remaining states. Forty-five senators and 186 members of the House of Representatives earned approval ratings of 80 to 100 percent from the

most influential Chris-

tian Right advocacy groups: the Christian Coalition, Eagle Forum, and Family Resource

Tom Coburn, elected in 2004 as

senator from Oklahoma, called for a ban on abortion in his campaign, going so far as to call for the death penalty for doctors who carry out abortions once the ban went into place. Senator John Thune is a creationist. Jim DeMint, senator from South Carolina, wants to ban single mothers from teaching in

The 2004

Election Day exit polls found that 23 percent of voters identified themselves as evangelical Christians; Bush won 78 percent of their vote. A plurality ofvoters said that the most issue

in the campaign had been "moral values."ll The Bush administration has steadily diverted billions of dollars of taxpayer money from

and governmental social-

service organizations to faith-based organizations, bankrolling churches and organizations that seek to dismande American democracy and create a theocratic

The role of education

and social-welfare agencies is being supplanted by these churches, nearly all of them evangelical, and the wall between church and state is being disassembled. These groups can and usually do dis-criminate by refusing to hire gays and lesbians, people of other faiths and those who do not embrace their strict version of Christianity. Christian clinics that treat addictions or do pregnancy counseling (usually with the aim of preventing abortion) do not have to hire trained counselors or therapists. The only requirement of a new hire is usually that he or she be a "Bible-believing Christian." In fiscal year 2003, faith-based organizations received 8.1 percent of the competitive social-service grant budget. In fiscal year 2004, faith-based organizations

received $2.005 billion in funding-l0.3 percent of federal competitive service The federal government awarded more than

billion in com-

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petitive social-service grants to faith-based organizations in fiscal year 2005, 11 percent of all federal competitive

Faith-based organizations are consistently winning a larger portion of federal social-service funding. a trend that has tremendous social and political consequences if it continues. The Bush administration has spent more than $1 billion on chastity programs alone. Thirty percent of American schools with sex-education programs teach abstinence only. Not only is there little accounta-bility, not only are these organizations allowed to practice discriminatory hiring practices, but also, as research shows, while abstinence-only programs can sometimes get teenagers to delay sex, they also leave young men and women unprepared for sexual relations. resulting in higher rates of teenage pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases.

It is perhaps telling that our closest allies in the United Nations on issues dealing with reproductive rights, one of the few issues where we cooperate with other nations, are Islamic states such as Iran. But then the Christian Right and radicallslamists, although locked in a holy war, increasingly mirror each other.

They share the same obsessions. They do not tolerate other forms of belief or disbelief. They are at war with artistic and cultural pression. They seek to silence the media. They call for the subjugation of women. They promote severe sexual repression, and they seek to express themselves through violence.

Members of the Christian Right who have been

to

powerful political offices have worked in several instances to exclude opponents and manipulate vote counts. The current Republican candidate for governor of Ohio, Kenneth Blackwell, a stalwart of the Christian Right, was the secretary of state for Ohio as well as the co-chair of the state's Committee to Re-Elect George Bush during the last presidential election. Blackwell, as secretary of state, oversaw the administering of the 2004 presidential elections in Ohio. He handled all complaints of irregularities. He attempted to get the state to hand over all election

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polling to Diebold Election Systems, a subsidiary of Diebold corporated, a firm that makes electronic voting machines and has close ties with the Bush administration. By the time of the elections he had managed to ensure that Diebold ran the machines in 3S counties. In an August 14, 2003, fund-raising letter, Walden O'Dell, CEO of Diebold, told Republicans that he was ted to helping Ohio deliver its electoral votes to the president next year." 11

O'Dell and other Diebold executives and board members are supporters of and donors to the Republican Party.38

Blackwell, an African American, oversaw a voting system in which African Americans, who vote primarily Democratic in national elections, found polling stations in their districts, especially in heavily Democratic areas such as Cleveland, grossly under-staffed. There were in these polling stations long lines with delays that sometimes lasted as long as 10 hours, sending many potential voters home in frustration. Aggressive poll monitors questioned and often disqualified new voters because of what the monitors claimed was improper registration. Blackwell banned photographers and reporters from polling places, making irregularities and harassment harder to document. The Diebold machines recorded record high tumouts-124 percent in one of the precincts-where Bush won overwhelming victories and low voter turnout in districts that went for Democratic Senator John Kerry campaign workers reported numerous irregularities, including the discovery of a machine that diverted votes from Kerry to Bush. Ray Beckerman, part of the Kerry campaign, said that he found that touch-screen voting machines in Youngstown were registering "George W. Bush" when people pressed "John F.

Kerry" during the entire day. Although he reported the glitch shortly after the polls opened, it was not fixed. All reports of irregularities, including complaints about precincts where votes were counted without the presence of election monitors, passed through Blackwell's

Nothing was ever done. Indeed,

Blackwell went on after the elections to issue to county boards of

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elections a demand that voter registration forms be printed on

"white, uncoated paper of not less than SO-pound text weight," a heavy card-like stock. This allowed his office to disqualify registrations because the paper was not thick

The ruling has,

his critics say, jeopardized the right of tens of thousands of would-be voters to participate in the next elections. As the Christian Right gains control of state offices throughout the country, it is being tarred by opponents with similar accusations.

Followers in the movement are

within closed systems

of information and indoctrination that cater to their hates and prejudices. Tens of millions of Americans rely exclusively on Christian broadcasters for their news, health, entertainment and devotional programs. These followers have been organized into disciplined and powerful voting blocs. They attend churches that during election time are little more than local headquarters for the Republican Party and during the rest of the year demand nearly all of their social, religious and recreational time. These believers are encased in a hermetic world. There is no questioning or dissent. There are anywhere from 1.1 million to 2.1 million children, nearly all evangelicals, now being home-schooled.·2

These children are not challenged with ideas or research that Oict with their biblical worldview. Evolution is not taught. God created the world in six days. America, they are told, was founded as a Christian nation and secular humanists are working to stroy the Christian nation. These young men and women are often funneled into Christian colleges and universities, such as FalweU's Uberty University, Pat Robenson's Regent sity, and a host of other schools such as Patrick Henry University.

They are taught, in short, to obey. They are discouraged from critical analysis, questioning and independent thought. And they believe, by the time they are done, a host of myths designed to destroy the open, pluralist society.

Most of America's fundamentalist and evangelical churches are led by pastors who embrace this

belief sys-

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tern, one that embraces magic, the fiction of a "Christian nation"

in need of revitalization, and dark, terrifying apocalyptic visions.

They preach about the coming world war, drawing their visions from the Book of Daniel and the Book of Revelation. They preach that at the end of history Christians will dominate the earth and that all nonbelievers. including those who are not sufficiently Christian, will be cast into torment and outer darkness. They call for the destruction ofwhole cultures, nations and religions, those they have defined as the enemies of God.

As American history and the fundamentalist movement itself have changed, so have the objects of fundamentalist hatred. Believers were told a few decades ago that communists were behind the civil-rights movement, the antiwar movement and liberal groups such as the ACW. They were racist and intolerant of African Americans, Jews and Catholics. Now the battle against communism has been reconfigured. The seat of Satan is no longer in the Kremlin. It has been assumed by individuals and institutions promoting a rival religion called "secular humanism." The obsession with the evils of secular humanism would be laughable if it were not such an effective scare tactic. The only organized movement of secular humanists who call themselves by that name is the American Humanist Association (AHA), which has about 3,000 members and whose credo was published in the 1933

Manifesto I and the 1973 *Humanist Manifesto II.* Its *Humanist Magazine* has a minuscule circulation. In terms of influence. as Barbara Parker and Christy Macy wrote, "these humanists rank with militant vegetarians and agrarian anarchists, and were about as well known-until the Religious Right set out to make them But it is not important who is fingered as Satan's agent, as long as the wild conspiracy theories and paranoia are stoked by an array of duplicitous. phantom enemies that lurk hind the scenes of public school boards or the media. As the movement reaches out to the African American churches and right-wing Catholics, it has exchanged old hatreds for new ones,

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preferring now to demonize gays, liberals. immigrants. Muslims and others as forces beholden to the Antichrist while painting themselves as the heirs of the civil-rights movement. The movement is fueled by the fear of powerful external and internal mies whose duplidty and cunning is constantly at work. These phantom enemies serve to keep believers afraid and in a ened state of alen, ready to support repressive measures against all who do not embrace the movement. But this tactic has quired the airbrushing out of past racist creeds-an effort that, sometime after 1970. saw Jerry Falwell recall all copies of his earlier sermons warning against integration and the evils of the black race. The only sermon left in print from the 19608 is called "Min·

isters and Marchers." In the sermon Falwell angrily denounces preachers who engage in politics, specifically those who support the civil-rights movement. The effort to erase the past, to distort truth and reinvent himself as a past supporter of civil rights, is a frightening example of how, if a lie is broadcast long enough and loud enough, it becomes true. Distortions and lies permeate the movement, which fends off criticism by encasing its followers in closed information systems and wrapping itself in Christian vest-ments and the American flag.

The movement is marked not only by its obsessions with conspiracy theories, magic, sexual repression, paranoia and death, but also by its infatuation with apocalyptic violence and force.

On its outer fringes are collections of odd messianic warriors, those ready to fight and die for Christ. These include American Veterans in Domestic Defense, a Texas group that transported former Alabama Supreme Court justice Roy Moore's 2.6-ton 10 Commandment monument by truck around the country. Moore, who graduated from the U.S. military academy at West Point, lost his job as chiefjustice of the Alabama Supreme Court after he defied a judge's order to remove his monument from the Montgomery judicial building. He and his monument instantly became celebrities for those preaching that Christians were under siege, that there

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was an organized effort to persecute all who upheld God's law.

These carefully cultivated feelings of persecution foster a permanent state of crisis, a deep paranoia and fear, and they make it easier to call for violence-always, of course, as a form of self-defense.

It turns all outside the movement into enemies: even those who appear benign, the believer is warned, seek to destroy Christians.

There are an

of obscure, shadowy

groups, such

as Christian Identity, the members of which, emboldened by the rhetoric of the movement, believe they will one day fight a religious war. Military leaders who stoke this belief in a holy war are lionized. After leading American troops into battle against a Somalian warlord, General William Boykin announced:

knew my God

was bigger than his. I knew that my God was a real God and his God was an ido1." General Boykin belongs to a small group called the Faith Force Multiplier, whose members apply

princi-

ples to evangelism in a manifesto summoning warriors "to the spiritual warfare for souls." Boykin, rather than being reprimanded for his inflammatory rhetoric, was promoted to the position of deputy undersecretary of defense for intelligence. He believes America is engaged in a holy war as a "Christian nation" battling Satan and that America's Muslim adversaries will be defeated

"only if we come against them in the name

These visions of a holy war at once terrify and delight followers. Such visions peddle a

spiritual Darwinism.

Christians will rise to heaven and be saved, and all faiths

and nonbelievers will be viciously destroyed by an angry God in an orgy of horrific, apocalyptic violence. The yearning for this final battle runs through the movement like an electric current.

Christian Right firebrands employ the language of war, speak in the metaphors of battle, and paint graphic and chilling scenes of the violence and mayhem that will envelop the earth. War is the final aesthetic of the movement.

"Now, this revolution is not for the temperate," the Ohio pastor Rod Parsley shouted out to a crowd when I heard him speak in

become

recognized,

"And

AMERICAN FASCISTS

Washington in March of 2006. "This revolution-that's what it is-is not for the timid and the weak, but for the brave and strong, who step over the line out of their comfort zone and truly decide to

disciples of Christ. I'm talking about red-

blooded men and women who don't have to be right, rewarded or regarded.... So my admonishment to you this morning is this. Sound the alarm. A spiritual invasion is taking place. The secular media never likes it when I say this. so let me say it twice," he says to laughter. "Man your battle stations! Ready your weapons! They say this rhetoric is SO inciting. I came to incite a riot. I came to effect a divine disturbance in the heart and soul of the church. Man your battle stations. Ready your weapons.

Lock and load!"

BatdeCry, a Christian fundamentalist youth movement that has attracted as many as 25,000 people to Christian rock concens in San Francisco, Philadelphia and Detroit, uses elaborate light shows, Hummers, ranks of Navy SEALs and the imagery and rhetoric of battle to pound home its message. Ron Luce, who runs it, exhorts the young Christians to defeat the secular forces around them. "This is war," he has said.

Jesus invites us to

get into the action, telling us that the violent-the 'forceful'

ones-will lay hold of the kingdom." The rock band Delirious, which played in the Philadelphia gathering, pounded out a song with the words: "We're an army of God and we're ready to die.

. . . Let's paint this big 01' town red.... We see nothing but the blood ofJesus...." The lyrics were projected on large screens so some 17,000

participants could sing along. The crowd in the Wa-chovia sports stadium shouted in unison: "We are warriors!"4S

The use of elaborate spectacle to channel and shape the passions of mass followers is a staple of totalitarian movements. It gives to young adherents the raw material for their interior lives, for love and hate, joy and sorrow, excitement and belonging. It imparts the illusion of personal empowerment. It creates comradeship and solidarity, possible only as long as those within the

movement do nOt defy the collective emotions of the crowd and willingly devote themselves to the communal objective, in this case creating a Christian America and defeating those who stand in the way. It gives meaning and purpose to life, turning a mun-dane existence into an epic battle against forces of darkness, forces out to crush all that is good and pure in America. And it is very hard for the voices of moderation to compete, for these tades work to shut down individual conscience and They give to adherents a permissiveness, a rhetorical license to engage in acts of violence that are normally taboo in a democratic society. It becomes permissible to hate. The crowds are wrapped in the seductive language ofviolence, which soon enough leads to acts of real violence.

Apocalyptic visions inspire genocidal killers who glorify violence as the mechanism that will lead to the end of history. Such visions nourished the butchers who led the Inquisition and the Crusades. as well as the conquistadores who swept through the Americas hastily converting en masse native populations and then exterminating them. The Puritans, who hoped to create a theocratic state, believed that Satan ruled the wilderness surrounding their settlements. They believed that God had called them to cast Satan out of this wilderness to create a promised land. That divine

command sanctioned the removal or slaughter of Native Americans. This hubris fed the deadly doctrine of Manifest Destiny.

Similar apocalyptic visions of a world cleansed through violence and extermination nourished the Nazis, the Stalinists who con-signed tens of thousands of Ukrainians to starVation and death, the torturers in the clandestine prisons in Argentina during the Dirty War, and the Serbian thugs with heavy machine guns and wraparound sunglasses who stood over the bodies of Muslims they had slain in the smoking ruins of Bosnian villages.

The ecstatic belief in the cleansing power of apocalyptic violence does not recognize the right of the victims to self-preservation or self-defense. It does not admit them into a moral

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universe where they have a criminal's right to be punished and rehabilitated. They are seen instead through this poisonous lens as pollutants. viruses, mutations that must be eradicated to halt further infection and degeneration within society and usher in utopia. This

violence-whether it arises from the Bible,

Serbian nationalism. the dream of a classless society. or the goal of a world where all "subhumans" are eradicated-allows its per-petrators and henchmen to avoid moral responsibility for their crimes. The brutality they

carry out is sanctified, an expression of not human volition but divine wrath. The victims, in a final irony, are considered responsible for their suffering and destruction. They are to blame because, in the eyes of the dominionists.

they have defied God.

Those who promise to cleanse the world through sacred violence, to relieve anxiety over moral pollution by building mounds of corpses, always appeal to our noblest sentiments, our highest vinues, our capacity for self-sacrifice and our utopian visions of a purified life. It is this coupling of fantastic hope and profound spair-dreams of peace and light and reigns of terror, self-sacrifice and mass murder-that frees the consciences of those who call for and

out the eradication of fellow human beings in the name of God.

Societies that embrace apocalyptic visions and seek through sacred violence to implement them commit collective suicide.

When Jerry Falwell and Pat Robenson, as they do, sanction emptive nuclear strikes against those they condemn as the enemies of God, they fuel the passions of terrorists driven by the same vision of a world cleansed and purified through apocalyptic violence. They lead us closer and closer toward our own annihilation, in the delusion that once the dogs of war, even nuclear war, are unleashed, God. will protect Christians; that hundreds of lions will die, but because Christians have been blessed they alone will rise in triumph from the ash heap. Those who seek to do us harm will soon have in their hands cruder versions of the

fervently

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apocalyptic weapons we possess: dirty bombs and chemical or biological agents. Those who

wish for, indeed, seek to

hasten the apocalypse and the end of time. who believe they will be lifted up into the sky by a returning Jesus, force us all to kneel before the god of death.

If this mass movement succeeds, it will do so not simply because of its ruthlessness and mendacity, its callous manipulation of the people it lures into its arms, many of whom live on the margins of American society. It will succeed because of the moral failure of those, including Christians, who understand the intent of the radicals yet fail to confront them, those who treat this mass movement as if it were another legitimate player in an open society. The leading American institutions tasked with defending tolerance and liberty-from the mainstream churches to the great research universities, to the Democratic Party and the media-have failed the country. This is the awful paradox of tolerance.

There arise moments when those who would destroy the tolerance that makes an open society possible should no longer be tolerated. They must be held accountable by institutions that maintain the free exchange of ideas and liberty. The radical Christian Right must be forced to include other points of view to counter their hate talk in their own broadcasts. watched by tens of millions of Americans. They must be denied the right to demonize whole segments of American society, saying they are manipulated by Satan and worthy only of conversion or eradication. They must be made to treat their opponents with respect and acknowledge the right of a fair hearing even as they exercise their own freedom to disagree with their opponents. Passivity in the face of the rise of the Christian Right threatens the democratic state.

And the movement has targeted the last remaining obstacles to its systems of indoctrination, mounting a fierce campaign to feat hate-crime legislation. fearing the courts could apply it to them as they spew hate talk over the radio, television and Internet. Despotic movements harness the power of modem commu-

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nications to keep their followers locked in closed systems. If this steady poisoning of civil discourse within these closed information systems is not challenged, if this movement continues to teach neighbor to hate neighbor, if its followers remain convinced that cataclysmic violence offers a solution to their own ills and the ills of the world, civil

in America will collapse.

"Hope has two beautiful daughters," Augustine wrote. "Their names are anger and courage; anger at the way things are, and courage to see that they do not remain the way they Anger, when directed against movements that would abuse the weak. preach bigotry and injustice, trample the poor, crush dissent and impose a religious

is a blessing. Read the

lical prophets in First and Second Isaiah, Jeremiah, Micah and Amos. Uberal institutions. seeing tolerance as the highest virtue, tolerate the intolerant. They swallow the hate talk that calls for the destruction of nonbelievers. Mainstream believers have often come to the comfonable conclusion that any form of announced religiosity is acceptable, that heretics do not

The mainstream churches stumble along, congregations often mumbling creeds they no longer believe,

to peddle a

theology that can distort and ignore the darker visions in the Bible as egregiously as the Christian Right does. The Christian Right understands the ills of American society even as it exploits these ills to plunge us into

Its leaders grasp the endemic

hollowness, timidity and hypocrisy of the liberal churches. The Christian Right attacks

relativism," the creed that there

is no absolute good and that all value systems have equal merit-even as it benefits, in a final irony, from the passivity of people who tolerate it in the name of cultural relativism.

The most potent opposition to the movement may come from within the evangelical tradition. The radical fundamentalist ment must fear these

Christians, who have remained loyal to the core values of the Gospel, who delineate between right and wrong, who are willing to be vilified and

in the name of a

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higher good and who have the courage to fight back. Most liberals, the movement has figured out, will stand complacently to be sheared like sheep, attempting to open dialogues and reaching out to those who spit venom in their faces.

Radical Christian dominionists have no religious legitimacy.

They are manipulating Christianity, and millions of sincere believers, to build a frightening political mass movement with many similarities with other mass movements, from fascism to communism to the ethnic nationalist parties in the former Yugoslavia. It shares with these movements an inability to cope with ambiguity, doubt and uncenainty. It creates its own "truth." It embraces a world of miracles and signs and removes followers from a rational. reality-based world. It condemns self-criticism and debate as apostasy. It places a premium on action and finds its final aesthetic in war and apocalyptic violence.

The pain. the dislocation. alienation, suffering and despair that led millions of Americans into the movement are real. Many Americans are striking back at a culture they blame for the c1e of their lives. The democratic traditions and the values of the Enlightenment, they believe, have betrayed them. They speak of numbness. an inability to feel pain or joy or love, a vast emptiness. a frightening loneliness and loss of control. The rational, liberal world of personal freedoms and choice lured many of these people into one snake pit after another. And liberal democratic society, for most. stood by passively as their communities, families and lives splintered and self-destructed.

These believers have abandoned, in this despair. their trust and belief in the world of science, law and rationality. They eschew personal choice and freedom. They have replaced the world that has failed them with a new. glorious world filled with prophets and mystical signs. They believe in a creator who performs miracles for them, speaks directly to them and guides their lives, as well as the destiny of America. They are utopians who have found rigid. clearly defined moral edicts, rights and wrongs.

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to guide them in life and in politics. And they are terrified of losing this new, mystical world of signs, wonders and moral certitude. of returning to the old world of despair. They see criticism of their belief system, whether from

or judges, as vi-

cious attempts by Satan to lure them back into the morass. The split in America, rather than simply economic, is between those who embrace reason, who function in the real world of cause and effect. and those who, numbed by isolation and despair, now seek meaning in a mythical world of intuition, a world that *is* no longer reality-based, a world of magic.

Those in the movement now fight, fueled by the rage of the dispossessed, to crush and silence the reality-based world. The dominionist movement is the response of people trapped in a de-formed. fragmented and disoriented culture that has become lous and unforgiving, a culture that has too often failed to provide the belonging, care and purpose that make life bearable, a culture that. as many in the movement like to say. has become "a culture of death." The new utopians are not always wrong in their critique of

American society. But what they have set out to create is far. far worse than what we endure. What is happening in ica is revolutionary. A group of religious utopians. with the sympathy and support of tens of millions of Americans. are slowly dismantling democratic institutions to establish a religious tyranny, the springboard to an American fascism.

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CHAPTER TWO

The Culture of Despair

They attacked liberalism

it seemed to them the

pal premise of modern society; everything they dreaded seemed to spring from it: the bourgeois life, Manchesterism, material-ism, parliament and the

parties, the lack of political leadership.

Even more, they sensed in liberalism the source of all their inner sufferings. Theirs was a resentment of loneliness; their one desire was for a new faith, a new community of believers, a world with fixed standards and no doubts, a new national religion that would bind all Germans together. All this, liberalism denied. Hence, they hated liberalism, blamed it for making out-of them, for uprooting them from their imaginary past, and from their faith.

-*Fritz Stern,* The Politics of Cultural Despair: A Study in the Rise of the Germanic Ideology'

tories of rage are first stories of despair.

Jeniece Learned stands amid a crowd of earnest-looking men and women, many with small gold crosses in the lapels of their jackets or around their necks, in a hotel lobby in Valley Forge, Pennsylvania. She has an easy smile and a

mane of

black, shoulder-length hair. She is carrying a booklet called *Ringing in a*

ofLife. The booklet has the schedule of the two-day event she is attending organized by the Pennsylvania Federation. The event, says the booklet, is

to the 46

million

who have died from legal abortions

1973

and the mothers and fathers who mourn their loss."

Learned, who drove five hours from a town outside of Youngstown, Ohio, was raised Jewish. She wears a gold Star of

neck

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David around her

with a Christian cross inset in the middle

of the design. She stood up in one of the morning sessions. attended by about 300 people, most of them women, when the speaker. Alveda King, niece of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., asked if there were any "postabortive" women present. Learned runs a small pregnancy counseling clinic called Pregnancy Services of Western Pennsylvania in Sharon, where she tries to talk young girls and women, most of them poor, out of abortions. She speaks in local public schools, promoting sexual abstinence rather than birth control as the only acceptable form of contraception. And in the fight against abortion and in her conversion, she has found a structure. purpose and meaning that previously eluded her.

Her life, before she was saved, was chaotic and painful. Her childhood was stolen from her. She says she was sexually abused by a family member. Her father left her mother when Learned was 12. She says her mother periodically woke her and her younger sister and two younger brothers in the middle of the night to flee landlords who wanted back rent. The children were bundled into the car and driven in darkness to a strange apartment in another town. Her mother worked nights and weekends as a bartender.

Learned. the oldest. often had to run the home.

"There was a lot of fighting," she says.

remember my dad

hitting my mom one time and him going to jail. 1 don't have a lot of memories. mind you, before eighth grade

of the sexual

abuse. When *my* dad divorced my mom, he divorced us. too."

Learned said she learned to repress and contain her emotions.

She remembers sitting bewildered at a meal with the family member who had molested her the night before and wondering why he treated her with ice-cold disdain. Her younger sister, who was sexually abused by another member of the family, eventually committed suicide as an adult. something Learned also considered.

Suicide seemed. as she grew into adulthood, a release. the only road out of the hell of her existence.

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"My grandfather committed suicide, close family members tried she says. "In my

there was no hope. The only way

to solve problems when they got bad was to end your life.

"My family put the 'dys' in 'function:" she adds.

had rela-

tives switching husbands and wives with other couples. I am so thankful that God moved me 3,000 miles away. I am so thankful He pulled me out ofthat. Because I am so glad my children ... you know, when I was pregnant with my daughter, I said, 'God, just break the

... just break the chains: And He has. My

dren have no idea about the dysfunction I lived through. I really truly believe that Satan got a hold of my family early on. I feel like Satan had this huge grip."

The instability and abuse, the constant moving, saw her retreat into herself. By the time she graduated she had attended three high schools. She was an angry young woman. At 15 she became pregnant. She had an abortion, using the name of her school bus driver to get into the clinic.

"Between being sexually abused, my parents being divorced, my mom being gone all the time, my brothers giving my mom such a hard time, my mother was always in a bad mood," she says.

was criticized and put down a lot. I was never good enough. Things were never good enough. The only time I got love was when my mom was taking me to these photo shoots and beauty pageants, and really pushing modeling. And the only time I got love from my mom is when I would win beauty pageants."

Learned moved out of the house before she was I 8, drifted and ended up in Beverly Hills, working nights in a strip club wearing a leotard and French

corset. At one point she was homeless and called a family member for a place to stay. On the ride over, driving her I 968 Volkswagen Beede, she thought of veering it over the edge of the raised highway. On the second night at the house, the family member came into her room and tried to molest her. She fled to a friend's apartment. It was not long after that she

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married her husband Rod and found Jesus, but the trauma of her past continued to plague her.

"I started having some major sexual dysfunctions." she says.

lot of flashbacks were coming back. A lot of memories that I did not remember were coming back. I was really struggling. And here I am newly married. I didn't want any part of it. There would be times when Rod and 1 would

to be intimate and I would

just fall apart. And he didn't know what to do."

She was taking classes at Pacific Christian College when she and Rod were living in Orange County. During a chapel service an antiabonion group, Living Alternative, showed a film called *The Silent Scream.*

"You see in this movie this baby backing up trying to get away from this suction tube," she says.

its mouth is open, and it is

like this baby is screaming. I flipped out. It was at that moment that God just took this veil that I had over my eyes for the last eight years. I couldn't breathe. I was hyperventilating. I outside. One of the girls followed me from Uving Alternative. And she said, 'Did you commit your life to Christ?' And I said, 'I did.'

And she said, 'Did you ask for your forgiveness of sins?' And I said, 'I did.' And she goes, 'Does that mean all your sins, or does that mean some of them?' And I

'I guess it means all of

them.' So she said, 'Basically, you are thinking God hasn't forgiven you for your abortion because that is a worse sin than any of your other sins that you have done.'»

The film brought her into the fight to make abortion illegal.

Her activism became atonement for her own abortion. She gled with depression after she gave

(0 Rachel. When she

came home from the hospital she was unable to care for her infant.

She thought she saw an eight-year-old boy standing next to her bed. It was, she is sure, the image of the son she had murdered.

"I started crying and asking God over and over again to forgive me," she says. "I had murdered His child. I asked Him to forgive me over and over

again. It was just incredible. I was possessed.

is

The Culture ofDespair

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On the fourth day I remember hearing God's voice: 'I have your baby, now get up!' It was the most incredibly freeing and peaceful moment. I got up and I showered and I ate. I just knew it was God's voice."

The combination of abuse, shame and guilt, as well as the depression and despair, marked a period of her life that she wants to forget. The certitude of her new life is a comfort. It is a life of moral absolutes. It is a battle against a culture she despises. Its rigidity-its sanctification of hatred for those who would "murder" the unborn or contaminate America with the godless creed of secular humanism-brings with it feelings of righteousness and virtue. Her faith gives her an emotional grounding and a vent for her anger. Embracing the Christian community means destroying competing communities. The power of her yearning for inclusion, for those who surrender to Jesus,

matched by the

power of her destructive fury. She is fighting for something good and against something evil, and it is an evil she knows intimately.

The stories many in this movement tell are stories of failure-personal, communal and sometimes economic. They are stories of public and private institutions that are increasingly distant and irrelevant, stories of loneliness and abuse. Isolation, the plague of the modern industrial society, has torn apart networks of extended families and communities. It has empowered this new movement of dreamers, who bombard the airwaves with an idealistic and religious utopianism that promises, through apocalyptic purification, to eradicate the old, sinful world and fill the resulting emptiness with a new world where time stops and all problems are solved. The movement promises to followers what many never had: a stable home and family, a loving community, fixed moral standards, financial and

personal success and an abolition of uncertainty and doubt. It offers a religious vision that will make fragmented, lost individuals whole. It provides moral clarity.

It also promises to exterminate, in one final, apocalyptic battle, the forces many of these people blame for their despair. Learned,

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mid-2000.[1]

through her faith, put her life

together. And she waits, like

many believers. for a day when the forces that nearly destroyed her life are vanquished and rendered impotent.

Learned lives in the nation's rust belt. The flight of manufacturing jobs has turned most ofthe old steel mill towns around her into wastelands of poverty and urban decay. The days when steelwork-ers could make middle-class salaries are a distant and cherished memory. She lives amid America's vast and growing class of dispossessed. tens of millions of working poor, 30 million of whom make less than $8.70 an hour, the offidal poveny level for a family of four. Most economists contend that it

at least twice this rate

of pay to provide basic necessities to a family. These low-wage jobs, which come without benefits or job security. have meant billions in profits for the corporations that no longer feel the pressure or the need to take care of their

workers. Learned and her neighbors have watched helplessly as jobs are automated or outsourced. After 1970, when manufacturers dosed huge plants and moved them abroad. the real earning power of wages for men, who once could bring in enough income for their households. stopped rising. Economics professors Peter Gottschalk of Boston College and Sheldon Danziger of the University of Michigan found that about half of those whose family income ranked in the bottom 20 percent in 1968 were in the same group in 1991. Of those who moved up.

nearly

remained below the median income.2

The loss of manufacturing jobs has dealt a body blow to the American middle class. Manufacturing jobs accounted for 53 percent of the economy in 1965; by 1988. they accounted for 39 percent. By 2004 they accounted for 9 percent. This is the first time since the industrial revolution that less than 10 percent of the American workforce is employed in manufacturing.3 There has been a loss of nearly 3 million manufacturing jobs nationwide since

The forced retreat by workers into the service

sector. into jobs that pay little more than the minimum wage. has left many households desperate. Laborers in the steel mills and

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manufacturing plants once made an average of $51,000 annually.

Those who have moved into the service sector now make $16,000

in the leisure and hospitality sector, $33,000 in health care, or $39,000 in construction. In 2004, average employee compensa-tion in the United States fell for the first time in 14 years.'

tween 2000 and 2004, Ohio lost a quarter of a million jobs.

Cleveland became the nation's poorest big city, and young people are fleeing the state in massive numbers to find work.

The bleakness of life in Ohio exposes the myth peddled by the Christian Right about the American heanland: that here alone are family values and piety cherished, nurtured and protected. The red states, which vote Republican and have large evangelical populations, have higher rates of murder, illegitimacy and teenage births than the

blue states, which vote Demo-

crat and have kept the evangelicals at bay. The lowest divorce rates tend to be found in blue states as well as in the Northeast and upper Midwest. The state with the lowest divorce rate is Massachusetts, a state singled out by televangelists because of its liberal politicians and legalization of same-sex marriage. In 2003, Massachusetts had a divorce rate of 5.7 divorces per 1,000 married people, compared with 10.8 in Kentucky, 11.1 in Mississippi and 12.7 in Arkansas."

Couples in former manufacturing states such as Ohio have to find two jobs to survive. The economic catastrophe has been accompanied by the erosion in federal and state assistance programs, the cutting of funds to elementary and secondary education, the reduction

assistance to women through the

Women, Infants and Children Supplemental Nutrition Program, along with reductions in programs such as Head Start and federal programs to assist low-income families, elderly people, and ple with disabilities who once turned to the government for rental assistance.7 Federal abandonment of the destitute came at a time when these communities most needed support. As the years passed and the future began to look as bleak as the present, this

families

Chicago.[8]

convert,

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Chris-

despair morphed into rage. Learned has watched

unravel

under the pressure. Domestic violence, alcoholism and drug abuse run like plagues through the depressed pockets around her community. And Ohio, seething, has more white nationalist groups than any state in the Midwest (73), according to the Center for New Community in

It is hard to argue that Learned, or any other

is typi-

cal. The movement cuts across class and economic lines. Not all who fall into despair tum to the Christian Right. Learned focuses her life on the fight against abortion rather than on campaigns to elect Christian candidates. She is not panicularly political. But she knows intimately the despair that is the fuel of the movement. While this despair manifests itself in many ways and produces many varied reactions and belief systems, it shares a common feeling of loss, of abandonment, of deep pessimism about the future. When despair is this profound, the desperate begin to seek miracles. It is easier, indeed understandable, to look for hope and comfon in the mystical hand of God. It is easier to believe that destiny has been preordained and that the faithful will be blessed. even if they have to go through hard times.

tian conservatism has allowed Learned to redirect her anger, an anger many around her share, at those who have failed to heed the word of God. She believes, like 36 percent of all respondents according to a Gallup poll, that the world is soon coming to an end.9 She has read and accepts as prophetic the 12-volume *Left Be-series of apocalyptic Christian novels by Timothy LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins that has sold more than 60 million copies. The manufacturing and industrial world around her has already seen its apocalypse. The rusting hulks of old plants loom like giant, rusted dinosaurs along the roadsides. The labor and pain and sacrifice of a lifetime of toil have left workers bereft, impoverished and living in urban squalor and neglect. The world has and burned for them. Another apocalypse, one that will lift tians out of this morass, seems a welcome relief.*

Despair

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The ecstatic expectation of the Rapwre, in which the elect are raised up into heaven while the damned suffer unspeakable tor-ments below, creates, for the despairing, a dramatic and miracu-lous reversal of roles. This belief comforts those thrust aside in America, and in an age of greater and greater inequality, allows people to privatize their morality. They are told that people who suffer are responsible for their suffering; they must not be right with God. These believers can ignore their own social responsibility for inadequate inner-eity schools, for the 18 percent ofAmeri-can children who don't get enough to eat each day, for the homeless, for the mentally ill. They accept the curtailing of federal assistance programs and tum inward, assisting only those within their exclusive Christian community and damning the world out-This social concern is replaced by tiny, more manageable acts of personal charity, such as giving food packages to a family in the church or teaching young girls about abstinence.

like many in the movement, has little time for those who depend on the state. Goodness has become, in the new creed of the Christian Right, a question of judgment and carries with it condemnation. The movement allows marginalized people the pleasure of denouncing others, of condemning those they fear becoming. The condemnations give them the illusion of distance, as if by de-noundng the indigent they are protected from

indigent.

But this road also leads to a disastrous disengagement with the larger, more complicated systems and imbalances that fuels poverty and injustice.

think welfare has played a huge role," Learned says when asked about what contributed to the sickness of American society.

"I know that I am speaking just for my own area, but these men are not taking responsibility for

children. They live with

their welfare moms until the welfare moms get sick of them. They spit them out to some other welfare mom. And these guys don't work! They don't work. They live off the welfare money of these girls. They create babies allover the place. It is sickening! It is ab-

respon-

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walking

solutely sickening that we are not making these men take sibility for their babies. And what sickens me is these guys are driving around in these incredible cars, and you know they are dealing drugs!"

But while the movement depends on the dislocation and rage of millions of working-class Americans. it is not defined solely by economic boundaries. The common denominator is despair, a spair creeping into a threatened middle class, where jobs are also being outsourced and company layoffs are throwing older workers out of jobs. There may be more despair in places like Youngstown, but it exists in communities across the nation. including those of the middle and upper classes. where people feel isolated and adrift. In interview after interview, those in the movement spoke of desires for suicide before finding Jesus. Even if the feelings were fleeting and never acted upon, they indicate how terrible life had become before conversion. Despair is the most powerful force driving people into the movement.

June Hunt is the daughter of Texas billionaire H. L. Hunt, one of his 15 children by three different mothers. Her father. a staunch conservative who hated President John F. Kennedy. was a bigamist and can artist. He abused her mother and was remote, often terrifying. The terror, the fear and the instability of her childhood mirrored that of learned. And as with learned it was this shame, abuse. loss of control, and guilt that drove her to embrace religious utopianism.

grew up in a home where immorality abounded," she told an audience of Christian broadcasters in Anaheim, California, where she spoke for the first time in public about her past.

grew up in

a dysfunctional family, before there was knowledge of the word

'dysfunctional.' And it was not fun. There was fear, on

eggshells. There was disarray, there was disruption and dissension.

During my teenage years, my father was an enormous success in the business world. but an enonnous failure in our family world.

We were all eggshell walkers, at least around him.

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let me try to explain. Until I was 12 years old, I grew up with a different name, a different last name. My name was june Wright. My father

romantically involved with my

although he was twice her age. He was a married man with six children. My mother's father, meaning my grandfather, whom I never knew, died when she was three years old. And I believe she was trying to fill the father-void when he came along. And he was persuasive. And we were a covert family on the side, with four children, me being one. Actually, I will say this: truthfully, I discovered my father had a third family with four children in another city, another major city. We were the 'Wright' family. W-R-I-G-H-T.

I was told it was because my parents did what they thought was right. My mother was deceived, and later, she lived with horren-dous guilt and shame. And I, as I share this with you, I can remember her

us to church, and her craving to go inside, but

she felt too guilty, and so she couldn't walk into the doors of church. Shame poured out of every pore of her being. And she loved the Lord, and she felt trapped. She didn't know what to do.

She certainly didn't have the skills to deal with my father; at least she didn't know how to handle the situation. And I saw the agony on her face, and many times she would just go to a church, during the week, and just stay there for hours and just pray.

"I prayed, I wasn't even a Christian at the time, but I prayed,

'Ob God, give my mother a friend.' You see, mother was afraid to have a friend, because she thought no one would accept her, that she would be rejected, and she didn't want to bring shame on a friend. Eventually, the first Mrs. Hunt died, and my father married my mother, and I became june Hunt. It was very difficult to plain this because my name already on the birth certificate was june Hunt. Ruth june Hunt. You'd think this would make things so much better, but it didn't. Dad was totally possessive of Mother.

She was a beautiful, gracious, and kind woman, but she was his trophy whom be showed off nightly to his dinner guests.

We kids were forbidden to speak at dinner; children were to be

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seen not heard, unless there was a conversation that would be of interest to everyone, and nothing was ever of interest to him.

"I trUly hated him," she tells the gathering. "I remember being 14 years old. I had a friend who had a father who was a lawyer. I asked him one evening, 'I have a friend who wants to know what would happen to a 14-year-old boy who commits murder: He answered, 'Well, the 14-year-old is a minor, so he probably would be released at age IS: That's all I needed to know. A few weeks later, I approached my mother with a proposition. I said, 'Mom. I figured out a way. how I

kill dad. There won't be much of a

repercussion because I am just a minor.' I was dead serious. What I appreciate, is my mother did not chide me, she did not laugh at me. Instead. with heart she said. 'Honey. I appreciate what you're trying to do. but that really won't be necessary.' It's not that tually wanted to commit murder, I just wanted the pain to stop.

know what it's like also to look for love in all the wrong places, anything for security, anything for comfon," she says. "I clearly know what it's like to feel desperate for hope in the night.

I had a nighttime of my life that lasted a number of years. The Book of Proverbs [Proverbs 14:12 and 16:25J says, there's a way that seems right, but in the end it leads to death. Clearly, I was headed the wrong way."

Those propelled into the movement. like Learned and Hum.

seek forgiveness for what they have thought or said. for what they have done, often for how they have lived. They seek meaning out of meaninglessness. worth out of lives that felt worthless. They seek firm. moral absolutes after being unable to distinguish tween right and wrong. They seek safety, the safety that comes with a utopian vision that tells them they are protected. loved, guided and blessed. They seek a world where good people, which they have become, have good things happen to them and bad people are tossed aside to be destroyed. Convens seek a world where they will never again have to retum to the lives they led, never again wonder if it might be better to end their lives, never again *The Culture ofDespair*

be tempted by the dark impulses that beset them. They embrace a collective madness to crush their personal madness.

This despair does not always rise out of severe want, the kind of want that plagues much of the developing world, or out of the immediate threat of war, but rather is the product of the disconnect-edness and loss of direction that comes with living in vast, soulless landscapes filled with strip malls and highways, where centers of existence and meaning have been obliterated. It is a response to a national malaise. This despair has created, perhaps more than any other force, the opening for these utopian visionaries.

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CHAPTER THREE

Conversion

Thus there is such a thing as human absorption. It appears in all the forms of conversion wherever the superior power of one person is consciously or unconsciously misused to influence profoundly and draw into his spell another individual or a whole community. Here one soul operates directly upon other soul. The weak have been overcome by the strong, the resistance of the weak has broken down under the influence of another person. He has been overpowered....

Life Together'

r. D. James Kennedy, tanned and dapper in a dark brown suit with a white handkerchief in his breast

and meticu-

lously combed silver hair, stands to the side of the podium and shares with us the most important tool in winning converts to Christ: becoming a friend. The seminar I am attending is being held in a hall of the Coral Ridge Presbyterian Church complex at Coral Ridge, Florida. Three spindly, white spires, all topped with crosses, above the cut-rate shopping centers and convenience Stores stretched along North Federal Highway in Fort

Lauderdale. The five-day seminar is designed to train us to teach Evangelism Explosion.

The program was begun by Kermedy in 1967 and is designed to train evangelists in the

and methods used to save souls for Christ.

"I would always go in first, introduce myself, Jim Kennedy," he begins. "I'm checking the lay of the land, and I will look around the living room and see if there's something there that 1 can ment about. Frequently, there will be a large picture somewhere and where did they put it, this picture? Why would they put it over the fireplace? Significant."

Conversion

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"In Fort Lauderdale you don't find too many fireplaces," he adds, smiling, "but there's some kind of central focus.

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golf trophies ... I'm over here looking at these golf trophies

painting ... I say, 'Beautiful painting. Did you paint that?' The first rule about looking at trophies: don't touch them ... 'Did you win all those

trophies?' So we have a titde conversation about golf, but I know enough about golf to have this conversation. Now what have I done? I'm making a friend.

"Compliment them on whatever you can," Kennedy says.

"Discuss what they do. You're going to find out what are their hobbies, maybe right there in the living room. Then you're going to ask them about what they do, where they're from, how long they've been there ... something to discuss with them ... In doing this, you have made a friend."

We sit with our green marbled Evangelism Explosion workbooks open to the chapter titled "Making Friends." We are taught how to get prospective converts to open up and feel at ease.

The manual suggests asking questions such as: "Tell me something about yourself."l We are instructed to listen attentively, since

"people usually are most interested in what they themselves have to say."3 Evangelists should "look the prospect in the eye, move your head up and down, echo what he says by repeating his words and voice inflection. Be sensitive to his felt needs and respond appropriately. Remember and use his name often in the conversation." And, it adds, "Pay a

Kennedy warns us not to carry a large Bible, but to keep a small one hidden in our pockets: "Don't show your gun until you're ready to shoot it."

Metaphors of war and sex saturate the lectures and the read-Kennedy says that the primary task of Christians is to

"soldiers in the

ofjesus Christ who are absent without official

leave (AWOL)."s He speaks of himself and other pastors as generals or admirals and of evangelists as soldiers. And he warns that it is Satan who convinces believers not to take part in the battle.

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Sexual metaphors are also sprinkled into the bellicosity of the can·

version message. A "functionally mature, responsible. reproducing Christian" 7 should be producing others like himself. Christians who

the gospel for themselves but do not convert others

"are like immoral seducers." "The seducer," Kennedy writes, "is satisfied merely to exploit and then tell of his exploits rather than entering into a meaningful marriage commitment." Kennedy re·

calls the difficulties he had one night during which he was unable to "consummate the witness'" with a new disciple's wife.

Conversion is a form of sexual warfare, a form of seduction and finally a form of physical conquest.

You must

to identify with your prospect. If that person

would talk about the fact that they were lonely and you had a lonely experience, man, you want to tie into that, you jump onto that ... get allover that with your testimony ...

they're

going to identify with you," Kennedy says.

The tactics of conversion come with layers of deception, duding, we soon learn, false friendships and cooked testimonies, the promise that the evangelists are

the

of eternal

life and that what they preach is the inerrant word of God and not be questioned. Conversion is supposed to banish the deepest dreads. fears and anxieties of human existence, induding the fear of death. This

the central message we are told to impan to

tential believers. But along with this message comes a disorienting mixture of love and fear, of promises of a warm embrace by a kind and gende God. that yearns to direct and guide the life of the con·

vert toward success, wealth and happiness, and also of an angry, wrathful God who must punish nonbelievers, those who are not

Conversion

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saved, tossing them into outer darkness and eternal suffering. The message swings the faces of this Janus-like God back and forth, one terrifying and one loving, in dizzying confusion. The emotions of love and fear pulsate through the message. God will love and protect those who come to Him. God will torment and reject who do not come to Him. It becomes a bewildering mantra.

Conversion, at first blush, is euphoric. It is about new friends, loving and accepting friends; about the final conquering of human anxieties, fears and addictions; about attainment of wealth, power, success and happiness

through God. For those who have known despair, it feels like a new life, a new beginning. The new church friends call them, invite them to dinner, have time to listen to their troubles and answer their questions. Kennedy tells us that we must keep in touch in the days after conversion. He encourages us to keep detailed files on those we proselytize. We must be sure new convens are never left standing alone at church. We must care when no one else seems to care. The new convens are assigned a "discipler" or prayer partner, a new friend who is wiser than they are in the ways of the Lord and able to instruct them in their new life.

The intense interest by a group of three or four evangelists in a potential conven, the flattery and feigned affection, the rapt attention to those being recruited and the flurry of "sincere" compliments are forms of "love-bombing," the same technique employed by cults, such as the Unification Church or Moonies, to attract prospects. It was a well-developed tactic of the Russian and Chinese communist panies, which share many of the communal and repressive characteristics of the Christian Right. This intense showering of affection on an individual, as psychiatrist Margaret Thaler Singer described in her 1996 book in *Our*

Midst. is often very effective:

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Love-bombing is a

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Love-bombing-or the offer of instant

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The new convert is drawn gradually into a host of church activities by his or her new friends, leaving little time for outside cializing. But the warmth and embrace

brings new rules.

When you violate the rules you sin. you flirt with rebellion, with becoming a "backslider, someone who was converted but has fallen and is once again on the wrong side of God. And as the new converts are increasingly invested in the church community, as they cut ties with their old community, it is harder to dismiss the demands of the "discipler" and church leaders.

is a

sin. Doubt is a sin. Questioning is a sin. The only proper relationship is submission to those above you, the abandonment of critical thought and the

mouthing of religious jargon that is morally charged and instantly identifies believers as part of the same, hermetic community. The psychiatrist Roben Jay Ufton describes this heavily loaded language, the words and phrases that allow believers to speak: in code, as "thought-terminating 11 "Jesus

is my personal Lord and Savior" or "The wages of sin are death"

are used, in this instance, to end all discussion.

Rules are incorporated slowly and deliberately into the convert's belief system. These include obedience to church leaders; the teaching of an exclusive, spiritual elitism that demonizes all other ways of being and believing; and a persecution complex

re-

Conversion

55

that keeps followers mobilized and distrustful of outsiders. The rules create a system of total submission to church doctrine. They discourage independent thought and action. And the result is the destruction of old communities and old friendships. Believers are soon enclosed in the church community. They are taught to value personal experience over reason, and to reject reason. For those who defy the system, who walk away, there is a collective banish-ment. The exit process is humiliating. and those who leave are condemned as "backsliders" no longer favored by God.

There is a gradual establishment of new standards for every aspect of life. Those who choose spouses must choose Christian spouses. Families and friends are divided into groups of "saved"

and "unsaved." The movement, while it purports to be about families, is the great divider of families, friends and communities. It competes with the family for loyalty. It seeks to place itself above the family, either drawing all family members into its embrace or pushing aside those who resist conversion. There are frequent prayers during the seminar for relatives who

are unsaved, who main beyond the control of the movement. Many of these prayers, including one by a grandmother in my prayer group for her unsaved grandchildren, are emotional, and it is not unusual to see saved Christians weeping over the possible damnation of those they love.

This control, while destructive to personal initiative and independence, does keep believers from wandering back into the messy situations they fled. The new ideology gives the believers a cause, a sense of purpose, meaning, feelings of superiority, and a way to justify and sanctify their hatreds. For many, the rewards of cleaning up their lives, repairing their damaged self-esteem, and joining an elite and blessed group are worth the cost of submission. They know how to define and identify themselves. They do not have to make moral choices. They are made for them. They submerge their individual personas into the single persona of the Christian crowd.

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Their hope lies not in the real world, but in this new world of miracles. For many, the confonnity, the flight away from themselves, the dismissal of facts and logic for magic, the destrUction (even with its latent

of personal autonomy amount to a

welcome and joyous relief The flight into the arms of the tian Right, into blind acceptance of a holy cause, compensates for converts'

and lack of

in themselves. And the more

corrupted and soiled. they feel. the more profound the despair, the more militant they become,

organizing and

to

create a pure and sanctified Christian nation, believing that this purity will offset their own shame and guilt. Many yearn to be ceived and directed. It makes life easier to bear.

The most susceptible people, we are told in the seminar, are those in crisis: people in the midst of a divorce; those who have lost a job or are grieving for the death of a close friend or relative; those suffering addictions they cannot control, illness, or the trauma of emotional or physical abuse. We are encouraged to target the vulnerable. In *The*

of

William

James wrote that those who experienced dramatic conversions might have been born with a "melancholy disposition," a chroni-cally "divided" mind- or else, he suspected, they had drunk "too deep of the cup

It is easier to bring about a conver-

sion when the person being proselytized is in crisis. Indeed, the goal of the conversion is to generate a sense of crisis by stressing that all who are unsaved are lost and in desperate need of help.

When he speaks, Kennedy exudes the oily charm of a traveling salesman. He is meticulous about his appearance: never a hair out of place, his face tanned to a leathery brown and his suits finely cut. He talks in a low, sonorous voice, one he uses every Sunday when, decked out in his robe and academic hood, he stands hind his massive mahogany pulpit at the start of the service and announces, "This is the day the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it," at which point the thunderous organ erupts in sations that rock the church. He is a rigid fundamentalist, deter-

water-skiing.

were

say?'"[13]

The

Greatest

mined to defend and prove the truths of the Bible through what he sees as intellectual, rational and scientific argument. His sermons can often be pedantic, filled with windy discussions about what he says are historical or scientific facts that illustrate the inerrant truth of the Bible. He is one of America's most public and vocal dominionists.

Kennedy was born in 1930 in Augusta, Georgia, and raised in a neighborhood on the South Side of Chicago by a glassware-salesman father, rarely at home, and an abusive, alcoholic mother.

It was not a happy childhood. Kennedy moved with his parents to Jacksonville, Florida. while he was in high school and by his own admission spent most of his time surfing and

In his

early 20s, he taught the fox-trot at an Arthur Murray Dance School in Tampa. He met his wife, Anne, there in 1952. But the official literature reads, "It all began on a Sunday morning in 1953, when he [Kennedy] was startled awake by a preacher's stem question on his clock radio: 'Suppose you

to die today

and stand before God, and He were to ask you, "What right do you have to enter into My heaven?"-What would you Kennedy explains he was unsure of his answer. He says he went to a bookstore and bought

Story Ever Told, the

1949 novel by Fulton Oursler that chronicles the life of Christ.

Kennedy had little experience with religion. He did not attend church regularly. The book, he says, opened his eyes to God. and he enrolled in seminary. He, unlike some of his charismatic or evangelical counterparts, did real academic work. He studied at Columbia Theological Seminary and the Chicago Graduate School of Theology. and received a PhD from New York University.

He began modestly with a small church. affiliated with the Presbyterian Church in America, which split with the mainline Presbyterian Church over what the schismatic sect branded its liberal theology. It had fewer than 100 members. But Fort lau-derdale proved to be fertile ground for the young

preacher, with families moving in droves into sprawling new developments. The

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Truths

week.[14]

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population influx helped swell his congregation. although the church literature portrays its growth as the result of successful proselytizing. He slowly built a massive multimedia empire.

Kennedy's weekly broadcasts of

Coral Ridge Hour can be seen

on more than 600 television stations and four cable networks and heard on the Armed Forces Network. It is the third most widely syndicated Christian program in the nation, reaching more than 3.5 million people. His radio show,

That Transform, is on

more than 744 stations. six days a

He runs a lobbying

group in Washington called the Center for Reclaiming America. as well as the Center for Christian Statesmanship. which evangelizes those who work in Congress. He hosts monthly luncheons. for members of Congress and their staffs, which feature conservative speakers. Kennedy believes that "the Christian view of morality and life is the one that should prevail in America."

He is fond of

quoting John Jay, the Chief Justice of the first U.S. Supreme Court, who said that "God in His providence has given to us a Christian nation, and it behooves us as Christians to prefer and select Christians to rule over us." Kennedy argues that this "was the Christian perspective of most of the founders in the beginning of this country."

job is to reclaim America for Christ, whateVer the cost,"

Kennedy has said.

the vice regents of God, we are to exercise

godly dominion and influence over our neighborhoods, our schools, our government, our literature and arts, our sports arenas, our en·

tenainment media, our news media, our scientific endeavors-in short, over every

and institution of human society." 17

Kennedy is opposed to abortion, homosexuality and the study of evolution. He rails against the values of the Enlightenment. He says that theories of evolution were the basis for Nazism, com·

munism and fascism and that "these are the views of men that have resulted in millions and millions of people dying."

He once told a reporter he'd never had a gay friend, adding, "I believe one was working at the dance studio [where he worked in

healed.[20]

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Prevail:

The

Attack

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them."[21]

Scott,

Conversion

59

his 20s], but I couldn't tell for sure. They are very good at blend-ing in." 19 Still, despite having no personal interaction with gay people (he says only ex-gays are members at his church), Kennedy formed Wonhy Creations Ministry, a branch of Exodus International, in 1998. Wonhy Creations preaches that homosexuality is a sickness that can be

The cultural decline *in* America is the result, he says, of stray-ing from Christian values. In

Gates ofHell Shalt Not

on Christianity and

You Need to *Know to Combat It,* a book Kennedy wrote in 1996, he writes that although the United States was once a "Christian nation," that is no longer the case because today "the hostile barrage from atheists, agnostics

and other secular humanists has begun to take a serious toll on that heritage. In recent years, they have built up their forces and even increased their assault upon all our Christian institutions, and they have been enormously successful in taking over the 'public square: Public education, the media, the government, the couns, and even the church in many places, now belong to The goal is not simply conversion but also eventual recruitment into a political movement to create a Christian nation. But this process is riddled with lies and deception. In the seminar, evangelists are told to pretend at first that they are taking a survey of religious belief to get people to talk and that proselytizers should hide their Bibles so their targets do not know they are being proselytized, and should ignore "No Soliciting" signs, since what they are giving people is "a free gift:'

Kennedy begins to talk about the godless character of liberal churches. He dismisses the members of these churches as "nominal Christians:' Referring to a potential conven whom he calls Kennedy tells us that since Scott had previously attended Grace Baptist Church, the word "grace" being a popular term within the Christian Right, he was probably a real Christian.

"Suppose we've got a lot of liberal churches in this area, and if you just named a church in this area that you go to, probably 90 to

"And

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Certainly

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10. I could tell whether or not you're a Christian," he says.

how could I do that? Simply because these liberal churches don't the Gospel. I can tell you a big liberal church in this area where you can stand outside the church, Sunday morning after service. and say. 'Excuse me, sir, I'm lost. I wonder if you can tell me how to get to heaven.' And I would venture to say that 98 percent could not tell you, and that's because the pastor is a liberal and he doesn't believe in heaven. He doesn't believe in salvation; he probably doesn't believe in sin.

doesn't believe in hell,

"There are millions of people in this country who attend church regularly," Kennedy tells us, "trying to live a good life and follow God's teachings, and yet somehow-now underline this next phrase-the church has failed to communicate to them how they can know for sure that they have eternal life and they're going to heaven."

At the Evangelism Explosion workshop we must write and rewrite our personal testimonies and practice delivering them in front of our assigned prayer partners, who critique them accord·

ing to the manual. The testimony is an illustration to the liever that the convened are absolutely

of eternal life and

have been freed from all human anxieties. The testimony, we are told by the instructor, must state explicitly that the fear of death has

banished forever. We must describe moments in our lives when death appeared certain and we felt at peace and certain of etemallife. The testimony has to stress and repeat this total certitude of our belief in eternal life and freedom from fear. We turn our testimonies in for correction by the instructors to make sure our essays have not deviated from the two

approved outlines of conversion, and we rewrite them when they come back with

"errors"

in red.

Freedom from fear, especially the fear of death, is what is being sold. It is a lie, as everyone who works to write and rewrite their testimonies has to know on some level. But few people would have the firmness of mind to admit this in front of other

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believers. Such an admission would be interpreted as a lack of faith. Yet creation of this internal conflict is also part of the process, for it fosters a dread of being found out, a morbid guilt that we are not as good or as Christian as those around us. The process, from its inception, is not only dishonest but cruel. The dissonance between individual sensibility and the group does not go away with conversion or blind obedience or submission. Belief systems that preach a utopian and unachievable ideal drive this angst underground, forcing the convert to measure him- or herself against an impossible ideal. This system ensures continuous feelings of inadequacy, self-doubt, guilt and self-loathing. That many converts feel deep remorse for past actions, for mistakes and cruelties, for the despair that has gripped their lives, only makes them more insecure.

The proper form for a conversion testimony is detailed for us in the Evangelism Explosion workbook:

Stage 1: What I was before. "Select one life concept such as loneliness, strife, guilt, fear of death, emptiness, rejection, insecurity, depression. Then include it (only one life concept per testimony) in an opening statement, saying, 'Before I received eternal life, my life was filled with a para1yzing fear of death.' Next, move from the general statement to a specific illustration out of your own life experiences. Give concrete details to make your illustration come alive.

Stage 2: How I received eternal life.

this point, you may

want to say something like, 'Not many months later, a friend shared with me the most wonderful news I'd ever heard-that God had provided eternal

for me and what the conditions were to

receive that life. As a result, many things changed in my Stage 3: What etemallife has meant to me. "At this point, you may want to share the life concept in reverse. If you selected fear

death.'"[24]

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of death as your life concept, you will now want to speak of courage in the face of death. If you chose the concept of guilt. you may now want to speak of forgiveness. The reverse of depression is hope; of emptiness, purpose; of rebellion, obedience. etc. Then you will want to illustrate the reverse life

concept with another illustration from your experience. For instance, you may want to say, 'The fear of death is now gone, and in its place is courage when fadng death situations or thoughts about

you prepare your testimony," Kennedy says, "realize that you are fashioning an evangelical tool, so that you will be a more ficient witness."

There are two possible types of conversion experiences, the class is told: a childhood conversion and an adult conversion.

Those who have experienced childhood conversions are told by the instructors not to state in the testimony that they were converted as a child. It will hurt their credibility with adults.

A childhood conversion testimony starts with the sentence

"I'm glad I have etema11ifebecauseit.sgiven me the certainty of knowing where I'm going when I die. And

of this, I have

no fear of death.n

The instructor gives us an example of an effective childhood conversion testimony:

"'Not long ago we were driving north on Interstate 57 during an ice storm that put a sheet of glazed ice on the highway.... We were easily easing along at 25 miles per hour, looking for a place to get off the highway to find shelter for the night, and as we were driving we came alongside a semitrailer truck.' They're painting a picture here.

wind was blowing very hard, and the trailer

truck became like a sailboat, catching the wind.' Got this picture?

'Whoa. The truck was gradually being pushed across the center line, and steadily toward the car. There was nowhere to go. We couldn't go to the

right because we'd run into the truck; we couldn't go to the left because we would eventually end up in a

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ditch with the truck on top of us. And as we waited to see the outcome, our tragic injury seemed cenain. My whole life came before me, and yet God gave me complete peace in my heart, knowing that even in light of this almost cenain tragedy, 1 knew for cenain that ifl were to die,

go to heaven. What a joy and a dif-

ference that made as I faced that danger. And it's the same today.

1 know that if 1 were to die right now, I'd go to be with God in heaven.'

"See?" the instructor goes on. "He captured your attention with a story, and that's what we're wanting you to build into your story, because all of you have that. 1 teach my trainers that they should be able to write a testimony like that. As they're listening in the introduction, the Lord will capture them with something in their own story with which they can build a testimony."

The adult conversion testimony, however, is different, although it too focuses on overcoming the fear of death. A stocky instructor recounts it for us:

"'Before 1received eternal life, 1had a fear of death and dying: Same concept: the thought of death terrified me. 'I had no idea what lay beyond death's door for me. When 1was in college 1was living in a small home alone. One night, a terrible Storm arose with wind gusts over 50 miles per hour. Kind

Wilma down

here; she was packing some heavy winds. The wind was so strong that the rain was pouring horizontally across the ground, our Iit-de mobile home was rocking on its concrete block foundation, and a bolt of lightning struck a tall oak tree right next to me. 1

was frightened, and 1 set up near to the sofa, fearful that 1 was going to die. Not many months later, a friend shared with me something very wonderful, and I received eternal life. Many things changed in my life. And now that I have eternal life, the fear of death and dying is gone. Not long after 1 received eternal life, we were driving

on Interstate 57 during an ice storm

that put a sheet of glazed ice on the highway.' ... Same illustration, only in the life of a person who's accepted Christ, you know?

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AMERICAN FASCISTS

And what happened before and then what happened after.

we

waited to see the outcome, death or tragic injury seemed and my whole life came before me,'"

The class has their workbooks open to the chapter "Sharing Your Testimony."

"Now here's *not* how to give a testimony," an instructor says.

received blessing when I became a Christian! I received deliverance through the Sinners' Prayer! I was unsaved and needed to be saved! My conversion happened when I put my faith in Jesus Christ, my savior, who died for the sins of those who trust Him.

Praise the Lord! Hallelujah! Amen! I received salvation when I believed the Gospel and was washed in the blood of the Lamb. and I was born again when the Holy Spirit spoke to me at the altar of God. I lost all my friends and I lost my job, but God has looked after me ever since, and praise His narnel The trials and tests are unbearable, and I just hope I can hold out until the end, and then maybe I'll be able to go to heaven!'

"You know," he says, "really, all of those things are true. All of those things are true of what happens in our lives. 'The blood of the Lamb: that's a great. great phrase. 'The Gospel: 'washed in the blood of the Lamb: 'born again when the Holy Spirit spoke to me at the altar of God: What's wrong with those statements?

Way too *churchy.* Now you think how lost people think, and they don't think that way. They don't understand that. That is a jargon, and they just don't have any clue.... We use phrases like that and toss them back and forth, and a lost person thinks we've dropped off another planet. So what we want you to do, we want you to go into your prayer groups and we want you to talk them through your story."

The class of 60 evangelism students, many of them pastors, breaks up into preassigned prayer groups to practice their personal testimonies again.

We are told to always emphasize the positive and to find common interests, experiences, or viewpoints that will allow "your

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prospect," as the potential converts are called in our manual, to identify with us. We are told to pepper our talk with uplifting thoughts, such as the comfort we have of going to bed every night and knowing that if we do not wake in the morning we will be in paradise with God. We are instructed to paint detailed pictures of terrible personal tragedies that have been solved by God. As an example, the manual quotes a parent saying that they had Christian son killed in Vietnam" but they are at peace with the loss the parent knows that, since the son was a Christian, he has eternal life, and the parent will be reunited with him in heaven. Our testimonies and conversions must be sprinkled with words like "love," "peace," "faithfulness," "hope," "purpose." and

"obedience." But the core of the message, the point we must impart to the potential conven, is that conversion has obliterated our fear of death, not only for ourselves, but the fear we have of losing those we love. This is what is being sold. And we, as the salespeo-ple, are meant to stand as proof that humankind's deepest fear, the fear of nonbeing, the fear of death, can be banished from life.

women from the church walk up in front of the group to role-play the conversion process. One sits in one of two green leather

on a raised platform. The other stands and pretends to knock on an imaginary door. The woman in the chair gets up to greet her visitor and welcomes her inside. They sit. The evangelist exchanges a few banalities about how nice the house looks and compliments her hostess on her taste in home furnishings. She

"makes a friend." She then gives her personal testimony. After the testimony, in quick succession, she asks the two questions that have to be

asked early of every potential convert. The class has been cautioned that

two people are present, begin by ask-

ing the person who

least likely to have the correct answer."

The goal is to elicit incorrect answers, answers that allow the evangelist to push home the message that time is running out, sin is accumulating. The gift of eternal life waits to be taken, but without salvation everyone is damned to eternal punishment.

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"'Have you come to the place in your spiritual life where you know for cenain that if you were to die today you would go to heaven, or is that something you would say you're still working on?'" the evangelist says, repeating verbatim the first question.

would say I am still working on it," the other woman swers.

The evangelist launches into the second question.

"Suppose you were to die today and stand before God and He were to say to you, 'Why should I let you into My heaven?' What would you say?"

Her mock recruit fumbles, talks about having lived a good life.

The evangelist repeats the answer, because, as the instructor has told the group, "this will help preclude the prospect saying at the end of the Gospel presentation, 'I've always believed in Jesus Christ and trusted Him alone for salvation,'"

This is an important moment, we are told, because the conversion process depends on potential converts saying they are not sure they will be granted eternal life and they have not placed their total trust and faith in Jesus Christ for salvation.

"When you answered that first question, I thought I had some good news for you," the evangelist says, lifting the sentence verbatim from the manual. "But after hearing your answer to this second question, I know that I have the greatest news you have ever heard."

The workbook, lying open in front of the onlookers, instructs the evangelist to say this sentence with "great enthusiasm," since, the workbook adds, this "precludes a hostile reaction."

Heaven, the potential convert is told after the questions are asked, is "unearned, undeserved, and unmerited. It's free." But it can come only through a commitment to Jesus Christ.

And then the discussion in the conversion process turns to sin. The evangelists are told to disabuse converts of the notion that sin is limited to robbery; murder, adultery or other specific acts. We are informed that sin

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God or is a transgression of His law.»

Sin, the convert is to be

told, is

fatal malignancy which infects the soul of the entire human

The conven is to be told that there is no escape

from sin and that even the most righteous commit innumerable sinful acts.

This defmition of sin is a subtle and pernicious twist to the traditional Christian concept of sin. As defined by Paul in his letters, sin is a state of being, a split between our conscious will and our real will, between us and something strange and alien within us. Sin is not, as Kennedy claims, a scorecard of rights and wrongs. For Paul, as well as many theologians such as Paul there is no action, no matter how moral and good, which is totally pure or moral, totally free from sin. Sin is, rather, a way of describing our estrangement from others and ourselves, from what Tillich calls

ground of our being."

It is estrangement

from the origin and aim of life. When we carry out acts that ther this estrangement, when we violate our relationships with others and with ourselves, we sin. But Kennedy paims sin as something quantifiable, as if there were a digital coumer that recorded one sin after another and stored the information in some heavenly bank account.

An instructor turns to a church member and illustrates how to speak about sin to a potential convert:

I could get to the point where only ten times a day or five times, or let's say three times a day, maybe one attitude

[of] sin-jealousy or anger or bigotry-maybe one thing ... slips from my mouth that's hateful," he says.

maybe I miss doing

something that I know I should do, like help my neighbor when they're having a special need. What do you suppose would pen if! got that good? Man, I'd practically be a walking angel! But do you realize that at the end of the year I [would] have a sand violations against God's law? And ifI live to be, well I'm 59

right now, so I'd have 59,000 violations against God's law, What would happen ifI died right now, or not died right now but stood

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before a judge right now with 59,000 traffic violations? Think what would happen. He'd say, 'This is a habitual offender; let's get him off the road.' And he'd basically take my license and I wouldn't be able to drive. Well, imagine standing before the judge of the universe with 60 or 70

violations against God's

law. And that's at the very best. that's at the very best! But what we're really trying to say with this is, you know, not only does a little add up to a lot, bur our sin problem is serious. And then you can move right in."

At that point the pairs form again to practice delivering the message about sin.

After the practice session, the instructor asks: "Why do we put the

illustration in there?" Several people call

out answers.

little bit of sin turns into a lot of sin," he says.

right.

It's that multiplication again."

The point the evangelists are instructed to make is that eternal life cannot be achieved through good deeds or even a good life. It is impossible to earn your way into heaven. We must accept that we have sinned, will always commit sins, and ask to be born again so Jesus will take our sins upon Him. Once this is done we can learn to live a new way, a way that, while not totally free of sin, allows us to live a life approved by God, a life in which, with the help of the church, we learn to reject sinful acts. The believer can

learn to condemn and avoid sinful acts-actS defined for him or her by church leaders as anything that doesn't please or is a

transgression of His law. The leaders determine these acts, rousing the believer against what they label as sins, such as abortion or homosexuality. The emphasis, once the conversion is made, is on acts, acts that please or displease

The believer can delin-

eate these acts only with the aid of church leaders. There is a culated destruction of individual conscience. All must submit to the will of those godly men who define the communal good. Sin, in short, is anything the leaders do not like.

Conversion

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"Because He is a just judge, He must punish our sins; His law declares that our sins must be punished and that He 'will by no means clear the guilty.' There is no doubt about this!" the tor tells us.

The potential conven is to be told, finally, that Jesus came to eanh and died

pay the penalty for our sins and to purchase a

place in heaven for us" and that "to receive eternal life you must transfer your trust from yourself to Jesus Christ alone for eternal The convert is asked whether he or she is willing turn

from what you have been doing that is not pleasing to Him and follow Him as He reveals His will to you in His Word."

The evangelist and convert bow their heads and pray, with the convert repeating each line after the evangelist.

"Lord Jesus, I want You to come in and take over my life right now. I am a sinner. I have been trusting in myself and my own good works. But now I place my trust in You. I accept You as my own personal Savior. I believe You died for me. I receive You as Lord and Master of my life. Help me to turn from my sins and to follow You. I accept the free gift of eternal life. I am not worthy of it, but I thank You for it. Amen."

When this prayer is over the believers are told, "Welcome to the family of God." They are told to read a chapter a day in the Gospel ofJohn and that they will be visited again in a week to talk about the Bible. They are encouraged to pray because God "prom_

ised to hear and answer our prayers." They are told to find "a good Bible-believing church and become a part of it." They are told to join a Christian fellowship group. And they are told to witness to their families. With this, the process of deconstructing an individual and building a submissive follower is begun.

The goal is more than building the church; it is building a Christian America. Kennedy talks often about the recruitment of legions of new believers to the political as well as the religious arena. He claims to have brought in millions through Evangelism Explosion.

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Kennedy insists that America was founded as a "Christian nation," The denial of the Christian roots of the nation, he says, is a

"great deception [that] has been used to destroy much aCthe religious freedom and liberty this country has enjoyed since its incep-And Kennedy's crusade is well funded and well

organized. He is backed with grants, often for millions of dollars, from conservative trusts such as the Orville D. and Ruth A.

lat Foundation and the Richard and Helen DeVos Foundation.

which has over the years given nearly $6 million to his church organizations. The drive to bring in new souls is also an open drive to broaden the political base of the movement and impose a theocracy.

The prayer partners are told to separate into dusters. Those in the room take turns practicing their testimonies in front of their group of three or four, with the other members critiquing the performance. The final version of each participant's written mony is to be turned in the next day. My prayer group has three other people, including one of the few African Americans, a thoughtful man who grew up in the church and was converted as a child; a middle-aged man who overcame drug and alcohol abuse as an adult through his conversion; and a grandmother, who said that as a child she had a morbid fear of death that was overcome only when she was saved and assured of eternal life. I pair off with the grandmother, who is chatty and friendly. We read our testimonies,

to get them exactly right.

A woman from the church tells us how to share the Gospel with a person who suffers from dementia or Alzheimer's disease.

She heads teams that go into 24-hour nursing homes and assisted-living facilities.

"These precious people are basically confined to these types of facilities," she says. "Now they say by the year 2025, there will be two seniors for every teenager on the face of this earth. And with multiplication and with people living longer, in the United States

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they say pretty soon there will be about SO million people that are alive [who] will end up spending their final years in some type of facility. So this is an untapped resource.

"They're always there," she tells the group.

so we get to

go back and we get to see Miss Mary, week after week after week, and share with her.

"The other thing that we're dealing with is different forms of dementia," she adds. "The most common form is Alzheimer's. So for most of us-and I mean, I forget things easily-we have to go back and repeat ourselves. But that's OK. Maybe the first week we'll just get through an introduction and maybe share our testimony, maybe the two questions. The next week we'll go back, we'll pick up with Miss Mary, maybe we'll have to refresh her memory.

"One thing that we get a lot with the elderly," she says, "they are so works-oriented because of the culture in which they were raised and having gone through the Depression. So we really have to talk about etemallife as a free gift. That has to be emphasized over and over and over."

Disruptions, reluctance to accept the message, open hostility and interruptions during the evangelization process are always blamed on Satan, part of what is described to us as "spiritual warfare."

"The devil is so obvious," an instructor says. "I mean, he's so easy to figure out."

The instructor recounts the story of a house visit. The evangelists were sitting in the living room of a woman who asked the team to convert her unsaved husband. At the moment the evangelists were about to get him to accept Christ, the phone rang.

was an old-fashioned message machine where you could hear the person," the instructor says. Through the loudspeaker on the machine, the group heard a child callout, "Daddy, Daddy, I know you're in there."

off,"

receive

The group sat and listened to the plea of the child. Finally the father said, "'Excuse me: and he walked over and just clicked it back

the instructor tells us. "He came back over, and my trainees at the time were just praying so hard. great drops of blood ... that that guy could

Christ. We got ahead of the

distractions."

—*Klaus*

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CHAPTER FOUR

The Cult of Masculinity

The monumentaIism offasdsm would seem to be a safety mech·

anism against the bewildering multiplicity of the living. The more lifeless, regimented, and monumental reality appears to be, the more secure the men feel. The danger is being alive itsel£

Theweleit, Male Fantasies'

obena Pughe was in second grade when her family moved to Fon Lauderdale. The family attended the church run by the Reverend D. James Kennedy on Commercial Boulevard. She grew up, along with the congregation, which eventually moved to a sprawling white building on Federal Highway.

By the time she was a teenager she was doing part-time modeling, taking tennis lessons from Chris Evert's father and studying classical piano. She was an honors student and captain of the cheer-leading team at Stranahan Public High School. When Pughe was 13, her mother was diagnosed with polycystic kidneys, a condition in which multiple cysts in the kidneys deplete their function. This moment ofpanic, oflooming

changed the household. Al-

though she would learn to cope with the illness and survive for many years, her mother believed that her life was about to end.

"It was somewhere in there that she told me that she was going to die," Pughe says. "Her two kidneys were functioning as one. So she was going through her own depression and had a bom-again experience."

Her mother, who had once attended Kennedy's church as a Sunday ritual, threw herself into the activities of the congregation. She led coffeehouses and home Bible studies. She took part in healing services, and pastors from the church came to the

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home and did a

healing with oil in an effort to thwart

her disease.

Roberta and her brothers fought their parents' efforts to pull them into the church. They made fun of the teenagers who attended Westminster Academy, the church-run high school.

who retreated to the third balcony during Sunday services, passing notes to her friends, paid little attention to the sermons preached by Kennedy before

a congregation that had swelled to 10,000 people.

"Then one day, Nicki came

who was a 25-year-old stud,"

she says. "He was very. very good-looking. with brown eyes, brown hair, a mustache and he rode a motorcycle. I went after him.

He was my ticket to God. He started taking me to Bible studies. I started attending Bible studies two weeks before my sixteenth birthday and had a born-again experience. *n*

The embrace of the new community, the sense that she had found an extended family, was at first exciting and appealing. But it also soon brought with it radical changes. She was told to adopt a more "Christian" lifestyle. Funk and pop music, her believing friends, the

modeling jobs and even the

lar high school were, she was told, thwarting her attempts to be a Christian. She destroyed her Motown and Michael Jackson records. She gave up modeling. She transferred to Westminster Academy, Coral Ridge's Christian school. She walked out on her old community.

was doing TV shoots, was in magazines," she says.

was

doing lots of stuff that now was sinful. All of it stopped. 1 started going to the Greenhouse Christian fellowship at the church four nights a

where we did Bible study."

Pughe turned her back on the world of nonbelievers. She struggled to obey. She suppressed her periodic waves of anger and frustration at the abrupt, painful and difficult changes imposed upon her, believing she had no right to question the demands of the church's male hierarchy. She feared the judgment and disap-

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The Cult of Masculinity

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community. She feared that she would displease

God. She kept down her longings for freedom and escape from the claustrophobic community. She was told to blame these feelings on Satan. She wanted to be

good. Christian woman." The

infusion of Christian jargon and cliches into her vocabulary. the inability to speak with others who might have validated her doubts and anxieties. left her unable to articulate or confront her feelings of dislocation. No longer sure what she felt or believed.

she worked harder to obey.

Pughe soon believed that God would punish her if she failed to carry out the demands of the men who spoke for God. those who now defined right and wrong. And the more she struggled with her inner turmoil. seeking to please God. which meant pleasing the male hierarchy that now dominated her life. the worse she felt.

All these anxieties. however. remained unnamed.

She began working at the GangWay Ministries for youth at the church and was involved in Kennedy's Evangelism Explosion program. designed to

teach people how to spread the Gospel in 20

minutes. The continuous dialectical training. much of it numbing in its boredom and repetitiveness. made it hard to articulate her doubt. Her life was filled with church meetings, new lessons to be learned and lectures. Solitude and reflection. along with thought itself. became difficult. Her head was spinning with slogans, cliches and religious jargon tht gave believers the illusion of knowledge.

I meet her late in the afternoon in her office in New Jersey, where she now is a family therapist.

is a fear-based model,"

she says. "The idea is to make people afraid and to then proceed to share the Gospel. I began training ministers from around the world. We were training ministers [on] how to train their youth to go out and proselytize. We used to go cold turkey onto the beaches. We used to go to shopping malls. There was a pamphlet with questions. and you had to ask all of them. You would go up to people cold. and you'd always stan with the two questions.

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"'So would you like to accept Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior right now?' we would ask," she remembers.

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She went to

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when she graduated from Westminster Academy. It was the only college to which she applied. During her senior year at college she decided to go to seminary, although she could not be ordained because she was a woman. Her father announced. however. that he would not pay for seminary. He told her it was time for her to get married and start a family. This, he assured

would make her

happy.

my senior year, I remember hearing on the radio an advertisement for the Miss Greater Grand Rapids Scholarship Pageant.

which was a part of the Miss Michigan Pageant, which was a part of the Miss America Scholarship Pageant," she says, "and I could win $2,500 in scholarship fees, which would cover my first se-mester of seminary. I entered the contest. I threw together a bathing suit, high heels, and I think I played

Elise.' I pulled

something out of my bag of tricks and I won."

She started competing for the Miss Michigan contest. She practiced three hours a day on the upright piano at Calvin Seminary. Many of her professors were cheering her on, telling her that, like the biblical figure Esther, she had been called to such a time as this. She was going to use the platform of the Miss America scholarship pageant, she told herself, to spread the Gospel.

Her victory seemed ordained by God.

was a legitimate way a woman could have a pulpit," she says.

bought all this. I was still quite asleep. This is what is so scary. I was anesthetized. I was programmed to believe all this. It was reinforced by my family and the church. There was this double authority that came from God. The male authorities in my life spoke for God. God spoke through my father, who was very thoritative and who held the power, as did the twelve male pastors in the church. All the leaders in my life were male. On

Sunday in the sermons God spoke to us as a male. I had nothing to plug into other than what these men told me, and they were all telling me the same thing.

"My female truth was not diminished,

was completely si-

lenced," she remembers. "It was obliterated. I had a mother, who was not a questioning female, who had also been socialized to be obedient. The good woman, they tell you, is the obedient woman.

I did not have any model of a woman who owned her own feminine truth."

She looks back on the time as one filled with fear, fear of not conforming, of disapproval in the eyes of the men who spoke for God, of falling out of God's favor, of not living up to Christian standards and incurring God's wrath and punishment.

"I was not conscious ofthis fear," she says, "and fear has a lot of power when it is not named. I didn't even know I was afraid. I was not allowed to be afraid. The message that is communicated there is nothing to be afraid of. When you hear someone say this, then that is when you should be most afraid."

She entered the contest, now cenain that God had chosen her to be Miss America and spread the Gospel.

"I met Cheryl Pruett, who had been the previous reigning Miss America," she says. "She too was an evangelical, born-again and from the South. She was just as convinced that God was raising Christian women to take the platform."

The state pageant was at Muskegon. She spent a week being paraded around before local groups, smearing Vaseline on her lips and keeping a smile pasted on her face. She lost ten pounds during the week before the pageant and did not have time to take in her gown, which now hung on her. When she mounted the stage, many of the professors from the seminary had come to watch.

"There I am in my bathing suit and my four-inch heels and, you know, professing God, you have three minutes to say who you are in an evening gown," she says. "I said something about God and my mission for God. So I was playing the piano, at that

point I had played Rachmaninoff's Prelude in G Minor. I suddenly went blank. I

'What are you doing here?' It was a mo-

ment of clarity as I sat there on that stage. I didn't win. I was in the top ten, but that blank moment during the prelude lost me points. I was devastated."

She left the seminary. She joined the staff for youth ministries at Coral Ridge, where she was the only woman. But even as she evangelized to others, she struggled with anger and betrayal. She felt God had called her to the beauty pageants and then abandoned her.

"How could God lead me down this path and promise me this? And then not come through?" she remembers asking herself. "I blamed God for failing to make my

fantasies come

true. I never acknowledged. of course, that these were secret fantaSies, that what I wanted was fame and fonune. I wasn't allowed to name these fantasies, not even to myself. I was going to buy my dad a Jag, because that was his favorite car, and he would never have bought it for himself. I was going to be proud on some level that I had attained this powerful position, when in my denomination, women couldn't even preach from a pulpit. So I had done it. You know, it was a big 'Fuck you!' Now you're telling me I can't? Watch me do it. But watch me do it within your confines, watch me do it within the restraints you put on me. But I was not aware of the expense to myself."

She drifted slowly away from the church, marrying, moving to Boston, raising two boys, finishing a two-year seminary degree and studying to become a licensed marriage and family therapist.

During those years she slowly deconstrueted her life and what had been done to her, until she quietly left the evangelical church, believing it had stunted her as a woman and forced her into a system based on submission.

The hypermasculinity of radical Christian conservatism, which crushes the independence and self-expression of women, is a way for men in the movement to compensate for the

of their

own

their object

to church authorities

and the calls for sexual restraint. It is also a way to cope with fear.

Those who lead these churches fear, perhaps most deeply, their own internal contradictions. They make war on the intemal dictions in others. Those who are not subdued, who do not bow before the church authorities, are seen as

contaminants. Believers are driven into a primitive state, a prenatal existence, a return to the womb and a life of submission. The assault on freedom, human equality and reason, however, also engenders feelings of omnipotence. Death and decay seem to be overcome. All are empowered by God, promised a utopian paradise and immortality. The movement feeds off of power and powerlessness, off of subjugation and controL It induces mass delusion. And the crowd, stripped of personal initiative, soon projects its dreams and aspirations for power through the leader. The surrender of personal power allows believers to indulge in fantasies about becoming instruments of a limit-less, divine power.

the spiritual vacuum grows, as fear increases,

violence in the

of God becomes not only seductive but imper-

ative. The movement, to compensate for the loss of personal power and submission, fosters a warrior cult and feeds its hapless followers a steady diet of battles, wars and apocalyptic violence.

Images ofJesus often show Him with thick muscles, clutching a sword. Christian men are portrayed as powerful warriors. The language of the movement is filled with metaphors about the use of excessive force and violence against God's enemies. Christ's stoic endurance of the brutal whippings in Mel Gibson's movie *The*

of the Christ reflects the brutal, masculine world of this ideology, a world that knows little of tenderness, personal freedom, ambiguity, nurturing and even pleasure. Jerry Falwell, in a *Yorker* interview, said Christ was not a gentle-looking, wil-lowy man: "Christ was a man with muscles," he insisted.l Falwell and Gibson see real men, godly men, as powerful, able to endure physical pain and suffering without complaint. Jesus, like God, has to be a real man, a man who dominates through force.

Hypermasculinity becomes a way to compensate, especially since the unspoken truth is that Christian men are required to have a personal, loving relationship with a male deity and surrender their will to a male-dominated authoritarian church. Submission to church authority. after all, is a potent form of emasculation. It en-tails a surrendering ofconscience and personal control and deadens emotions and feelings. Glorified acts of force and violence against outsiders, against nonbelievers. compensate for this unquestioning submission. The domination men are encouraged to practice in the home over women and children becomes a

of the domi-

nation they are taught to endure outside of the home.

There runs through the fundamentalist belief system a deep dread of ambiguity. disorder and chaos. Accordingly, the cult of masculinity keeps all ambiguity, especially sexual ambiguity, in check.. It

a world of binary opposites: God and man, saved

and unsaved, the church and the world, Christianity and secular humanism, male and female. These tidy pairings keep life from slipping back into a complicated nightmare. Reality, thus defined, is made predictable and understandable, something deeply comforting to believers who have had trouble coping with the messi-ness of human existence. There is, in this "Christian" worldview, clearly demarcated order and disorder. Behaviors that do not conform-such as homosexuality-are forms of disorder, tools of Satan, and must be abolished. A world that can be predicted and understood, a world that has clear boundaries, can be made rational. It can be managed and controlled. The petrified, binary world of fixed, immutable coles is a world where people, many of them damaged by bouts with failure, despair and their own ambiguities, can bury their chaotic and fragmented personalities and live with the illusion that they are now strong,

whole and protected. Those who do not fit, who are not subservient to dominant Christian males, must be proselytized, convened and

"cured" (if they are gay or lesbian) through quack therapy. If they remain recalcitrant they must be silenced. The decline ofAmerica

is described as the result of the decline of male prowess. This decline has led to weakness and moral decay. It has resulted in a bewildering human and social complexity that, often seen as feminine, is the work of Satan. By submitting to the Christian leader, and to a powerful male God who will destroy those who misbehave, followers avoid dealing with life. The movement seeks, above all, to banish mystery. the very essence of faith. Not only is the binary world knowable and predictable, but finally God is knowable and predictable.

Fundamentalism, Karen McCarthy Brown wrote,

the reli-

gion of those at once seduced and betrayed by the promise that we human beings can comprehend and control our world. Bitterly disappointed by the politics of rationalized bureaucracies.

the limitations of science. and the perversions of industrializa-tion. fundamentalists seek to reject the modem world. while nevertheless holding onto these habits of mind: clarity, certitude, and control."

Since life has a way of not respecting these artificial lines, since ambiguity. inconsistency and irrationality are part of human existence, the only way believers can push forward is to pretend that these troubling aspects of our internal and external reality do not exist. They create a parallel reality, one that allows them to escape from the reality-based world intO a world of their own creation. "Unconscious motives. deep longings, and fears are denied," Brown wrote, "and responsibility for them is abandoned, as fundamentalism makes a pretense of being all about cut-and-dried truth and clear and recognizable

Popular Christian conservative leader and talk-show host James Dobson has built his career on perpetuating these srereo-types. Born to evangelist parents. Dobson grew up in Oklahoma and Texas. He says he was born again when he was three at one ofms father's church services. He attended Pasadena College and received a PhD in child development from the University of Southern California. where he went on to teach. His first

book. *Dare to Discipline,* encouraged parents to spank their children with "sufficient magnitude to cause the child to cry genuinely:" It has sold more

than 3.5 million copies since its release in 1970. He has built a massive empire based on his advice to families as a Christian therapist. He is heard on

on

Family. a program

broadcast on more than 3,000 radio stations; runs a grassroots organization with chapters in 36 states; and runs his operation OUt of an 81-acre campus in Colorado Springs, Colorado, a that

has its own zip code. He employs 1,300 people, sends out four million pieces of mail each month. and is heard in 116 countries.

His estimated listening audience is more than 200 million worldwide, and in the United States he appears on 80 television stations day. He is antichoice,

abstinence-only sex education

exclusively and is fiercely antigay.7 He calls for prayer in public schools, but only if led by students, since teachers might encourage Christian students "to pray to Allah, Buddha or the goddess Sophia.'" He has backed political candidates who call for the execution of abortion providers, defines stem-cell research as "state-funded cannibalism" and urges Christian parents to pull their children out of the public school system. On his Family.org Web site he discusses "the countless physiological and emotional differences between the sexes." The article "Gender Gap?" on the Web site lists the physical distinctions between man and woman, including strength, size, red blood cell count and metabolism. For a woman, Dobson writes, love is her most important experience: love gives woman her "zest"; it makes up her "life-blood"; it is her primary "psychological need." Love holds less meaning in a man's life than a woman's-though a man can appreciate love, he does not "need" it.IO

"Genesis tells us that the Creator made two sexes, not one, and that He designed each gender for a specific purpose," Dobson goes on. And these

differences mean different roles: they mean the man is the master and the woman must obey.

The Cult of

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Dobson says that to achieve this tranquillity wives have to be submissive. He instructs the husband in how he "should handle his wife's submission" and goes on in Family.org to insist that "submission is a

we make. It's something each one of us must

decide to do. And this decision happens first in the heart. If we don't *decide in our*

that we are going to willingly submit to

whomever it is we need to be submitting to, then we are not truly submitting." Of course, the choice not to submit to the male head of the household, Dobson makes clear, is a violation of God's law.

The hierarchy fears romantic love. Sex, especially eroticism, in its most passionate, romantic form, threatens the iron control of the church leader. In Freudian terms, romantic love allows the id, or the "it," to be unleashed in a drive to satisfy uncontrollable passions. Restraint and self-control over these desires and passions are disarmed by romantic love. At the height of romantic love our fractious internal world suddenly appears whole. Men no longer rule women and women do not rule men. Male and female are ruled by the need to be affirmed by the other, by the lover. It is a moment of magical well-being, at least until passions cool and libido is tamed. Freud feared the intoxicating effects of romantic love, which he called "the overestimation of the erotic object," for the same reason he feared religion and totalitarian

movements. Freud cautioned against any emotion or movement that promised to unify the psyche behind a collective cause. The assault against romantic love within the radical Christian conservative movement *is* an assault by the male hierarchy against its most potent competitor.

"Freud had no compunction in calling the relationship that crowds forge with an absolute leader an erotic one," wrote Mark Edmundson:

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II

An absolute leader, called in Freudian terms the collective ego, is morally permissive. This is part of the leader's attraction.

Murder may be wrong, but the murder of infidel Iraqis or Islamic terrorists-or the genocidal slaughter of nonbelievers by an angry Christ at the end of time-is celebrated. This moral permissiveness is exciting and seductive and empowers followers to carry out acts of violence, often with a dean conscience. Those nonbelievers who are hurt or killed are at fault for turning their backs on God. Blind adherence to an absolute leader, especially one who permits violence, hands followers a license to unleash hidden, prohibited lusts and passions usually kept locked within the human heart. It permits followers to kill in the name of God.

The Cult of

85

"Freud believed that the inner tensions that we experience are by and large necessary tensions," Edmundson wrote, "not cause they are so enjoyable in themselves-they are not-but because the alternatives to them are so much worse. For Freud, a healthy psyche is not always a psyche that feels

These male church leaders, as Susan Friend Harding observed in *The Book ofJerry Falwell,* speak almost exclusively in their public pronouncements to other men. They implicitly privilege men in their rhetoric. She recounts a story of Falwell joking in 1986 at Temple Baptist Church about surrendering unconditionally to his wife, Macel. Falwell said he let Mace! get what she wanted. This was a decision he made. As an aside he quipped that, while he had not thought of divorce, he had thought of murder a few times.

"The anger and the threat of force here were ironic," Harding wrote, "but still served as little reminders of men's ostensible physical authority, their 'power-in-reserve'":

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men. Women were meant to overhear them. II

"These men suffered a loss of their own masculinity," Roberta Pughe says, "so they have taken on this extreme form of masculine power, the power to oppress and to dominate. On the extreme end of the masculine continuum,

it is the oppressive force that kills, that destroys. There is no room for anything else.

Everything else is a threat. The feminine is a threat. Children are a threat. Homosexuality is a threat because it embraces a feminine, nurturing side between men. All power has to be concentrated at the top and be destructive."

And she concedes that she still fights the fears instilled in her by the church.

"Here I am, a woman, 46 years old. seasoned and trained in my field. and I still am terrified to speak what I believe," she says.

"It gets clogged right here in my throat. I tremble at the thought of speaking my own thoughts when I go

to them, into their

circles. They see me as a heretic. a backslider, and say I am not a Christian any longer. They say I have lost my way. $0 there's nothing, from their point of view. that I have to offer.

"The goal of the movement is to create a

but they

must dominate women first to keep the system in place," Pughe says, the late afternoon light spilling into the windows of her office. "They want to have one nation under God, based on view of God and their interpretation of the rules that this peculiar God puts in place. They are doing this underground. They have huge networks. They are deeply

and they're connecting

with people who have lots of money and lots of power, and these people are very smart and savvy. They know how to put forward a public front that hides the private agenda. They have found a niche to be heard, to provide something. They run home Bible studies.

They offer people a sense of belonging and connection. They know the family's falling apart. The divorce rate is high. Families are in flux. Roles are in flux. Men and women are trying to figure out what we're doing together. And the church is filling the niche, providing the extended family. There is no extended family, so the church is providing it for these people. Their ticket to power is family values. That's the hook. People are hungry for that. But with this church family comes the imposition of an extreme male power structure. First, they use this power structure to control the family, then the church, and finally the nation."

The use of control and force is also designed to raise obedient, unquestioning and fearful children, children who as adults will not be tempted to challenge powerful male figures. These children are conditioned to rely on external authority for moral choice. They obey out of fear and often repeat this pattern of fearful obedience as adults. Refusal to submit to authority is heresy.

Raised in a home and a school where he or she is taught to see the world as one where the possibility of attack and danger lurks behind every crevice, the child learns to distrust outsiders. The benign and trivial take on satanic proportions. There is no safety.

Satan is always present. The pathology of fear, ingrained in the child, plays itself out in the constant search for phantom enemies who seek the destruction of the adult believer. These elusive and protean enemies, always there to lure the believer toward self-destruction, must be defeated to establish a world, ushered in by Christ's return, where no one will be able to do them harm, where the irrational is abolished and the binary lines of right and wrong are enforced by a Christian government. Only then will the believers be safe.

One of the tools used to keep believers obedient is the

"prophecy" of the Rapture. One day, without warning. the saved will be lifted into heaven and the unsaved left behind to suffer a seven-year period of torment and chaos known as the This event will, believers are told, suddenly and unexpectedly tear families. Those who are not good Christians will lose their mothers and fathers or their children. The big-budget films *lypse,*

and *Left Behind*, based on the

series by LaHaye and Jenkins, have popularized these fears, the films employing Hollywood stars such as Gary Busey, Margot der and Corbin Bernsen. The films show parents left behind as their infants have been raptured into heaven, screaming "My babies, my babies!" There is a shot of abandoned teddy bears and di-apers on the airplane seats. Children come home to find their parents gone. The world descends into anarchy, with trains, planes

and cars, now without engineers, pilots or drivers, crashing in deadly fireballs. In an instant, the United States, with as much as half its population lifted into heaven, is reduced to the status of a developing country. dominated now by an ascendant Europe that out the will of Satan through the Antichrist.

This conditioning of children to fear nonconformity and blindly obey ensures continued obedience as adults. The difficult task of learning how to make moral choices, how to accept personal responsibility, how to deal with the chaos of human life is handed over to God-like authority figures. The process makes possible a perpetuation of childhood. It allows the adult to bask in the warm glow and magic of divine protection. It masks from them and from others the array of human weaknesses. including our deepest dreads. our fear of irrelevance and death. our vulnerability and

It also makes it difficult, if not impossible,

to build mature, loving relationships, for the believer is told it is all about them, about their needs, their desires, and above all, their protection and advancement. Relationships, even within families. splinter and fracture. Those who adopt the belief system.

who find in the dictates of the church and its male leaders a binary world of right and wrong. build an exclusive and intolerant comradeship that subtly or overtly shuns and condemns the "unsaved." People are no longer judged by their intrinsic qualities, by their actions or capacity for self-sacrifice and compassion, but by the rigidity of their obedience. This defines the good and the bad, the Christian and the infidel. And this obedience is a blunt and effective weapon against the possibility of a love that could overpower the dictates of the hierarchy. In many ways it is love the leaders fear most, for it is love that unleashes passions and bonds that defy the carefully constructed edifices that keep followers trapped and enclosed. And while they speak. often about love. as they do about family. it is the cohesive bonds created by family and love they war against.

Joost A. M. Meerloo, the author of *The Rape of the Mind: The of Thought Control,*

and Brainwashing, wrote:

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All those who do not subscribe to this male fantasy, or who were born female or gay, must be pressured to conform. By disempowering women, by returning them to their "proper" place as a subservient partner in the

home, the movement

creates the larger paradigm of the Christian state. The men's movement Promise Keepers, which at its height a decade ago drew tens of thousands of men into football stadiums, called on men to

back" their role as the head of the household. The movement used the verse from Ephesians that calls on wives to "be to your husbands, as to the Lord" (Ephesians 5:22) to give the stance biblical authority.15 Women were not allowed to attend the events, although some could volunteer at concession stands outside. The founder of the group, fonner Colorado football coach Bill McCartney, called the movement's battle

abortion the

"Second Civil War" and lambasted gays and lesbians as "stark ing mad." He dismissed gays and lesbians as "a group of people who don't reproduce, yet want to be compared to people who do

reproduce, and that lifestyle doesn't entitle anyone to special rights."

The organization mounted campaigns such as "Real Men Matter," in which men were instructed to recover their male-ness in a "morally bankrupt, godless society." The goal of the movement, strongly supported by Dobson, was designed to help men regain their place in society. And while Promise Keepers as an organization is on the wane, the agenda it promoted is firmly embedded in the masculinity cult of the Christian Right.

In the megachurches, the pastor. nearly always male, is obeyed by the congregation. It is the pastor who interprets the word of God. This pattern is established on a smaller

in the home.

The male leader governs through a divine mandate, a mandate that cannot be challenged since it comes from God. And these leaders speak often about taking their cues directly from God.

These concentric male fiefdoms, radiating out from the home, do not permit revolt, discussion or dissent. And once women buy into this message, one that supposedly protectS their families, makes their boys into men, their husbands into

and

themselves into godly Christian women, they cede personal, political and

power. Those who are weak or different, those

who do not conform to the rigid stereotype, those who have other ways of being, must be forced by the stern father to conform and obey. If they do not bend, they will be destroyed by God.

The consequence of this disempowering of women was poignantly captured when Dobson interviewed Karen Santorum, wife of Pennsylvania Senator Rick Santorum, on

17,

2005, in the studios of the

Research Council for his radio

program. Karen Santorum home-schools her children, the principal role for women with children, according to Dobson and many others in the movement.

you ever looked out at the women who are in these exciting careers and making money and advancing in the corporate world, and so on? Have you ever looked at that and said, 'Did I do the right

Dobson asked.

"I really believe that the devil really tries to work on mothers at home," she told Dobson. "We all know he's the master of lies, and he will do everything he can to try to make mothers at home feel that way, like we're so inadequate, we're not fulfilled. And through my prayer life and just my relationship with Jesus, I feel without a doubt this [being a housewife] is the most thing I can do. It is what God wants for me; it's what He wants for my family. So I have in the early days-I did once in a while-Rick would be leaving to go to some nice event in a tuxedo, and be on the floor cleaning up milk.

be like, 'What's wrong

with this picture?' And I feel so blessed and honored to be home, and I know that my presence in their life will make a difference."17

The televangelists Benny Hinn and Pat Robertson rule their fiefdoms as despotic potentates. They travel on private jets, have huge personal fortunes and descend on the faithful in limousines and surrounded by a small retinue of burly bodyguards. These tiny kingdoms, awash in the leadership cult, mirror on a smaller scale the America they seek to create. There is no questioning.

Followers surrender their personal and political power, in much the same way women and children surrender their power to the male at home. The divinely anointed male leader rules a flock of obedient and submissive sheep. All must hand over their dom. All must cease to think independently.

The earnestness on the part of believers often gives the mass movement its air of honesty, sincerity and decency. Believers are not brainwashed. They are not mindless automatons. They are convinced that what they are doing is godly, moral and good.. They work with the passion of the converted to bring this Christian goodness to everyone, even those who resist. They believe that what they promote is moral and beneficial. And just as they fear for their own souls, they fear for the souls of those around them who

unsaved. This often well-intended earnestness, although employed for frightening ends, is a powerful engine within the movement. These idealists are willing to make great

personal sacrifices for the cause of Christ. They justify the powennent and eradication of whole peoples. such as Muslims or those

castigate as secular humanists, as mandated by God.

Nonbelievers have no place on the moral map. It is a small step from this toxic rhetoric and exclusive belief system to the disem-powennent and eradication of nonbelievers, a step a frightened and enraged population could well demand during a period of prolonged. instability or a national crisis.

The ruling *elite* of the movement, the James Dobsons and Pat Robertsons, are at the same time very distant from the masses.

They assume a higher intelligence and understanding that give them a divine right to rule. These men are-writ large-the powerful, all-knowing father.

they direct become as powerless,

credulous and submissive as children.

Danuta Pfeiffer, who from 1983 to 1988 was the

on

The 700 Club with Pat Robenson, sat with me and her husband one evening on the patio of her home outside of Eugene, Oregon.

She reached heights, because of her celebrity status, usually reserved for men, although it was always clear she had a role servient to Robenson's. She was the first person to be allowed to lead the mandatory

chapel service held before lunch at

the Christian Broadcasting Network, where *The* 700 *Club* is filmed. She was sent to speak at national Christian women's groups and later mixed audiences, numbering in the thousands, at several of the nation's largest megachurches.

She was also told, however, that being a single woman at the broadcasting network was inappropriate. She said she was "pressured" to get married and did, although the shaky union, not one she would have made on her own, soon fizzled and ended in divorce.

"An adviser at the network told me that marriage was the 'appearance of appropriateness.' and since I had been a single woman, traveling at times alone with the very married Pat Robertson, it was time to 'be appropriate,'" she said, a wood fire

throwing up sparks from the fireplace on her patio. "I had been a

'baby Christian' for only two short years. I was just beginning to learn that Christians perceived an unwed woman [as] a source of temptation. This was a man's world. And I had to be anchored to a man in order to move freely around them."

Her reception at the gatherings she addressed was frightening.

Crowds swarmed toward her, asking her to touch them and heal them. Her statuS was nothing compared with that of Robertson, she said, "who stands for his followers as the embodiment of God's conscience.

"They were seeking a message, a healing, hope, a little encouragement," she remembered. "They wanted a little piece of God.

They thought I could give it to them. People wept when I prayed for them, touched them or hugged them. It was as if they were meeting a rock star."

She was increasingly disturbed by the power that had been thrust upon her and the emotions unleashed by those who begged her for guidance in every aspect of their lives. She understood how pliant these people had become and how cleverly they were being manipulated. The realization led her finally to leave the movement. Her experience was a window into how willingly followers handed over their consciences to these leaders, abandoned all moral responsibility for the word of those who had vated themselves to the status of quasi-deities.

"They truSted us more than their family," she says. "They thought we had a clearer path to God because we were on television. They thought we were on television because God put us there. We were prophets to these people. We were seen as people who could walk on clouds and heal and pray. We were God's special messengers. Pat was seen as having the ear of God. He had words of knowledge that could identify their deepest fears and illnesses. We would identify people on the

by speaking about the

color of their clothes or an illness they had. We would say, 'There is a woman with a blue blouse crying at this moment. She has bad

hearing in one ear. She is being healed right now: And viewers would claim these hea1ings. They saw our presence on the show as a sign that we were anointed. They wanted to know how to live. how to

on a daily basis, how to communicate with

their family and friends, what jobs to get and how to interpret the world around them, even the daily news. They wanted every of emotional, spiritual and physical information. We had this kind of authority over their lives. They abdicated their hopes and lives to us because we spoke for God."

CHAPTER FIVE

Persecution

JOE: ..• Does it make any difference? That I might be one thing deep within, no matter how wrong or ugly that thing is, so long as I have fought, with everything I have, to kill it. What do you want from me? What do you want from me, Harper? More than that? For God's sake, there's nothing left, I'm a shell. There's nothing left to kill.

As long as my behavior is what I know it has to be. Decent.

Correct. That alone in the eyes of God.

Tony

Angels in America1

lakes of snow fall gently over the ponds, statues and lawns sloping down from the gold-domed Massachusetts State House. A cluster of several dozen young men and women walk along the edge of the Boston Common on

Street. They

chant, "Hate is curable and preventable!" "Jesus, cleanse this tern·

pie!" and "Conversion Therapy kills gay teens!" It is 7:30 in the morning. Many in the group carry rainbow-colored posters that say, "We're God's Children Too" and "God Loves Gays." Some peel away from the procession to dart into a Dunkin' Donuts.

They emerge a few minutes later cradling a cup of coffee or hot chocolate.

When they reach the Tremont Temple Church, they form a half-circle outside the front doors. Boston police are standing out front to block people

without registration papers from emering the building. The protesters have converged on the church to demonstrate against a Love Won Out conference, sponsored by Dobson's Focus on the Family, being held inside. Love Won Out officials, already nervous, have ordered lunch from Subway for the

nearly 800 people attending their conference so no one will have to leave the church. Love Won Out volunteers meet everyone coming through the front doors.

you registered?" a woman asks new arrivals politely.

Ifso, people are

upstairs, where their bags are searched

for tape recorders and cameras. Wrists are stamped and wrapped in bright orange-red bands. Only those wearing wristbands are allowed to file into the

The church has

dark, wooden

pews. It is surrounded on

sides by a balcony and has towering

stained-glass windows depicting biblical scenes.

The crowd takes several minutes to move through the swing-ing doors and settle into the pews. There are mothers and nervous teenage sons. Husbands and wives. their heads bent over the conference forms, circle on printed schedules the breakout sessions they plan to attend. Single men and women sit alone, thumbing through the conference notes. In a small media section at the back of the sanctuary, only a couple of seats are occupied.

The event does not welcome the "secular" media, which it accuses of promoting an anti-Christian agenda. Love Won Out volunteers walk up and down the aisles looking for potential infiltrators or anyone holding a tape recorder or a camera. Those who attempt to tape or photograph the conference will be ejected.

Love Won Out was founded, its brochure says, to help families, men and women, and especially those plagued by what the movement calls

attraction," recover traditional male

and female roles. The organization, led by many who identify themselves as "ex-gays," brands homosexuality as a disease and condemns it as a threat to the family, the health of the nation and Christianity. The movement's professed goal is to "cure" those who have "same-sex attraction." But it has also declared war against gays and lesbians who are unrepentant, those they brand as "militant" and who actively promote "the gay agenda." Although they speak the language of compassion toward those willing to be healed, they also say there should be no tolerance or

acceptance of gays and lesbians who refuse to seek help. And America will soon pay a price, they warn, for permitting gays and lesbians to live openly in defiance of God.

The legalization of gay marriage in Massachusetts *has* helped mobilize the Christian

including many in the state who see

the move as morally polluting their schools and communities.

Christian activists in Massachusetts

frequent guests at

dan conferences, where they speak: of their persecution by sexual radicals." This cultivated sense of persecution---eultivated by those doing the persecuting-allows the Christian Right to pro·

mote bigotry and attack any outcry as pan of the war against the Christian faith. A group trying to curtail the civil rights of gays and lesbians portrays

itself, in this rhetorical twist, as victims of an fort to curtail the civil rights of Christians. One ofthe most vocal is Tom Crouse, a pastor in Holland, Massachusetts, who hosts a show titled

Your World broadcast on local Christian radio station WVNE·AM 760 in Worcester. He features antigay guests and has held a "Mr. Hetero" contest in Wooster. The contest included gays." Crouse says the contest was a way of promoting "God's sign" in response to a "Mr. Gay 2005" competition held in San Diego. He refuses to use the word "gay" on his talk show, saying he uses the word only "in its proper context, which means 'happy.'"

"People will call in to my show and say, 'You're gay,' to me on the air, and I'll say, 'I'm gay, you're gay.'" He lashes out at sexual activists" who he says "are well financed, well organized, and small in numbers.

"They're rabid and they're active, and they have no problem telling you they're going to kill you," he has said, problem

telling you they're going to bum you to death, no problem telling you anything, all in the name of tolerance.

"If you listen to how Jesus is proclaimed today, you'd think Jesus is some tie·dye-shin-wearing, pot-smoking hippie. That's not who Jesus is. You know, Jesus was a man who spoke the truth. He said, 'You're of your father, the devil.' He walked away from those

who could have stoned him and killed him. Jesus

'I am God,

you are not. I am the living truth and the life. No one knows what God knows but me'-l say Jesus was the most intolerant person in the world. Jesus would not be accepted in many churches today."

Mike Haley, director of gender issues at Focus on the Family, and himself an

walks up and stands behind the pulpit in

the Boston church. His collared shin is pressed and tucked into his khaki pants. His sandy blond hair is combed neatly to the side. He welcomes the crowd to the first Love Won Out conference in Boston, the

36th event since its founding in

1998. Trinity Temple, he reminds those in the

has

hosted every president since John F. Kennedy and now, Love Won Out. He raises his fist in the air as the crowd claps and says.

The successful staging of the event in Massachusetts.

where same-sex marriages were first legalized, is, he assures the crowd, a victory for Christians.

Dr. Joseph Nicolosi. a clinical psychologist. is president of the National

for Research and Therapy of Homosexuality.

an organization known as NARTH. He says he has treated more than 1,000 men who came to him with "unwanted homosexuality." He has written three books on the subject, including his most recent, *A*

to

co-authored

with his wife,

Ames Nicolosi.

Nicolosi says that all men are "born to be heterosexual." He calls heterosexual orientation that which corresponds to man's

"true nature." Homosexuality, he says. "is a masculine inferiority." He speaks of "the gender identity phase" when the boy gins to realize that the world is divided into male and female.

Children who cannot

from their mothers and identify

with their fathers, he explains, become homosexuals. He says the male child is biologically

to fulfill his natural masculine

strivings. He is wired to be masculine. His body is designed for a woman." The job of the child is

dis-identify with the mother

and bond with the father."

99

The boy, he says,

to realize that he's like this father

image that he never really paid attention to before. He becomes interested in the father. And if he reaches out to the father, and if the mother supports him in making this transition, and if the father is welcoming and encouraging, the boy will make the transition. He'll bond emotionally with

his father, make that male identification, and that becomes the foundation of his sexual preference, what he finds sexually attractive."

But if the father is distant, detached, unavailable, in short a

"negative figure in the boy's eye," the boy will reach out to the ther and be hurt.

"He will be made to feel ashamed of his masculine ambition,"

Nicolosi says. "The father's nonresponsiveness will make him feel bad about that

and he will basically shut down. And he will

be shamed for his masculine strivings, and basically what he says is, 'If you make me unimportant, I make you unimportant. If you're not interested in me, I'm not interested in you: And you know, if you know any homosexual men, they do not have a good relationship with their fathers. Their fathers are just not that portant in their lives, period."

Nicolosi warns against fathers who are

and unmascu-

line, and perhaps beaten down by the mother." He says that boys need a "strong, masculine father who is worthy of imitation, of modeling, worthy of disconnecting from the mother:' He also cautions against an "overemotionally involved mother" who is a

"dominant, strong personality:'

He argues that mothers who do not cede authority to the ther, who do not represent to the boy that dad is the leader of the family, contribute to their child's homosexuality. In proper development, he says, the nurturing of women becomes less important as the boy grows older. The rougher play of the father is required if the boy is to develop into a man.

"You know, the young father tossing the son up in the air and catching him," Nicolosi says.

you know, the father is laugh-

ing and the kid is petrified, you know? And the mother is this ritual and she has no idea, she's getting a heart attack watch·

ing this. But as the father is tossing the kid up and down, the father is laughing, the son starts laughing. And a very important lesson has just been taught, one that men teach boys: danger can be fun. Even if the father drops the kid and cracks his head a little bit, at least he will be straight. A small

price to pay, I tell And when males are brought up by masculine fathers, when they become fully developed men, they are, he says, little dull,

you know what I mean? We don't see colors as vividly. Have you noticed? We don't seem to remember show tunes, I don't know why. Anyway, more imponantly than 'Danger can be fun: the boy is

by the father,

I

trust dad.' And

mosexual problem do not trust other men.»

Those who fail to achieve their masculinity, however, become mama's boys. They seek to please the mother. They are the kind of boys, he says, who leave for school with their hair in place and wearing neat, clean clothes and come home from school in the same, perfect condition.

"And you can see how in adulthood, the gay man desires to break that good little boy mold," Nicolosi says. "He is angry and wants to rebel. He's aggressive. He's shocking. He's offensive.

He's provocative because he wants to break out of that good little boy mold that he was in. While all the other boys were being bad, he was sitting with mommy in the kitchen; now he wants to be bad. Have you ever seen a gay pride parade? That's exactly right.

If you walk into a gay bar, it looks like a bunch of men who want to be bad little boys. You walk into a straight bar, and all these straight guys are sitting there, 'Yeah, yeah, yeah,' because they got it out of their system a long time ago. They're exhausted. Their wives exhausted them."

He throws out that gay men gravitate toward theater to "escape iota fantasy" because "fantasy is a big part of the gay identity."

A woman in a pew leans toward her husband and whispers that this is a description of their son.

The cure for what he terms the "male gender deficit," for those who suffer from "same-sex attraction," is "reparative therapy." It can come about through a dose connection with a heterosexual man who is comfortable

his male role. When

mosexuals "make an emotional connection with a straight man, their homosexuality disappears," he says. They no longer have trouble being assertive, and these "heterosexual men with a homosexual problem" are cured.

It is left to Mike Haley, who identifies himself as an ex-gay, to back up Nicolosi's assertions with personal testimony. He tells the group that his father was cold and distant, refusing to initiate him into the world of men, and taunted him because of his lack of athletic ability as "Michelle" or "my third daughter." He describes his dose relationship as an II-year-old boy with a man who eventually began to have sex with him.

Eventually Haley went to see a counselor who told him he was born gay. He frequented the gay bars and discos at Laguna Beach in California, not far from his home. He felt, he says, as if he had

"come home." His lifestyle, however, conflicted with the views of his church. And his pastor, when he confessed, told him he had to reform. The conflict between his desires and what he thought was right in the eyes of God began to haunt him.

"So what do you think 1 did as a 17-year-old junior in high school that didn't want to be gay?" Haley says. "I read my Bible and I read my Bible and I read my Bible and I prayed and I prayed and I prayed. I remember kneeling next to my bed and

'Lord, I'm

not going to stop praying until I feel different: only to fall asleep, waking up to feel just the same as I had when I had started to pray."

He finally turned his back on the church. He tells the group that at this juncture he believed Christianity was "a lie" and

"hated Christians."

"I wanted to be moral within my homosexuality," he says. "I wanted to have that long-term monogamous relationship. But when I didn't find it in this dty, I'd move to the next." He he says, on the "gay treadmill."

"It's not a whole lot different than the treadmill that I see some heterosexual women buy in to," Haley says. "When they lieve they have to be a

size, look a certain way. dress a cer-

way. to be acceptable to the heterosexual male population.

Well, you take that same phenomenon and put it into the gay community, and it seems overexaggerated. To be the accepted commodity, you need to look a

way. act a certain way.

drive a certain car, talk a certain way. So I was working out three to four hours a day. I was doing injectable steroids. I was bulimic because I wanted to eat, but I didn't want to gain weight because I had to have that perfect physique

that physique was

what defined my value and my worth during my time and involvement in the gay community."

He says he

a gay activist in Dallas. He marched in Gay

Pride parades.

And then one night Haley picked up a man at a gay gym. but as they progressed the man stopped and told Haley he could not have sex. Haley recalls him saying: "I'm sorry that I've led you on.

but I'm a Christian, and I'm

to walk away from this."

The twO men

most of the night. Haley was introduced

through the man to a counselor named Jeff Conrad, who promised to help cure him of his homosexuality. Haley started what he says was "a godly, Christian memoring relationship."

"He sent me birthday

'I don't even know if you're get-

ting this card, but I want to let you know that tlove you, that God loves you. that change is possible,'" Haley says. "I'd write him back the nastiest. ugly letters about his faith. about his God:

'Leave me alone, I was born this way.' He'd write me back: 'Mike.

I want you to go to the library. I want you to find me a study that

will prove to me that you *were* born gay. And if you can do that, then I will change the way that I believe.'"

Haley says he left his "homosexual lifestyle" in December 1989 after his sessions with Conrad. He omits the details of his

"cure." He got married. He returned to the church and became a youth pastor. He staned working for Dobson.

Dobson's attacks on gays are relentless and brutal. He likens the proponents of gay marriage to the

He warns in his

book

Fire that sanctioning gay marriage is the first salvo by the gay movement to destroy the American family. "This is an issue America has got to wake up to," Dobson writes. "The homosexual agenda is a beast. It wants our kids. . . .

And he

goes on to ask, "How about group marriage? Or marriage between daddies and little girls? How about marriage between a man and his

"Moms and dads, are you listening? This movement is THE

greatest threat to your children," Dobson warns. "It is of particular danger to your wide-eyed boys, who have no idea what demoralization is planned for them."s

This conference is one of many Dobson and his associates mount throughout the country every year. Bill Maier, vice president and psychologist in residence for Focus on the Family, rises to speak. He attacks the legalization of gay marriage in Massachusetts, which he calls "the most radical social experiment ever proposed in our country that's redefining the institution of marriage." He defines the ruling as one made by "four rogue judges on the Supreme Judicial Court who basically forced their will on the

people and the legislature of Massachusetts." The ing, he says, is "a radical redefinition of the human family." At issue is "whether men and women are unique and different and whether the two genders complete each other in their differences.

It's about whether mother and father are both essential in the process of healthy child development. and it's about whether

there are compelling societal reasons to define marriage as one thing and not define it as something else.

"When we follow God's blueprint for how we're supposed (0

live, things usually work out the way they're supposed to," Maier says.

when we defy God. when we live in ways that are con-trary to God's design for us, we often reap a harvest of pain and suffering in our lives." He warns that

we redefine marriage in

one way, there is no logical reason for us to not redefine it in other ways," leading to the legalization of "polygamy or group marriage," This opens up the possibility. he says, of fathers marrying their daughters. "They say, 'Well, if marriage can be fined to include two men or two women, what's to stop us from redefining it to allow marriage between a man and four women, or a group of six or seven adults and their various children?'

The danger of same-sex marriage is that it "will also teach our children that the words 'male' and 'female' and 'mother' and 'father' are simply meaningless social constrocts."

Melissa Fryrear. who says she used to be a lesbian, blames abusive parental relationships for "same-sex attraction."

"For those who have been abused by a male, oftentimes that tremendous rage, that hurt, can go underground, if you will, and it can begin to emerge later in life, perhaps in

your fe-

male identity or the fact that you look like a woman," she says.

"When I lived homosexually, I was very butch and very mannish. I still have some work to do"-a comment that elicits laughter-

"but I've covered some bases, too. I looked mannish and I looked masculine

it was a liability to be a woman. Because it

meant that I could be hurt, it meant that I could be and it was my suit of armor to keep me safe. So [it was a] rejection of that female identity. It can be a fleeing from men."

Many in the church take notes in the space provided in their conference booklets. Many cry softly when speakers mention giving up their lives to God and being cured of "same-sex attrac-

tion." And periodically, especially during the testimonies, there are shouts of "amen."

The speakers

gays of controlling television, radio and

Hollywood. The gay movement, they say, is more politically and powerful than other movements. Gays are attacked as diseased and part of the criminal class. But the bedrock of the attack is that homosexuality is against God's ordained natural order. that what gay men and women do is perverted and pathological. They are not only a threat to children, but a threat to Christians. Gays, those at tonight's conference are told. hate them and want to destroy them.

"Religion is treated as irrelevant or downright evil," Robert H.

Knight writes in *The Homosexual Agenda in Schools,* distributed by Dobson's Family Research Council. "Homosexual books, magazines and newspapers are filled with bitter and often obscene nunciations of religion in general and Christianity in particular.

One

calls for the outlawing of churches that disapprove of homosexual conduct. Another carefully outlines an advertising campaign that equates Christian clergy with Nazis and Klansmen.

Homosexual stage performers dress up in clerical garb and commit obscene acts. A gay-rights cartoonist depicts Christ having anal intercourse with His cross. These are not isolated examples from an otherwise gentle and loving literature. The attitude pervades the homosexual movement."6

Gays and lesbians within the church, seeking desperately to deny their sexuality and remain in the Christian collective, suffer severe depression and blows,to their self-esteem. The U.S. Surgeon General's office has

data indicating those who are

young and gay are two to three times more likely to commit suicide.7 Those who are able to conform, no matter what the personal cost, will find acceptance. Those who remain militant, who stand up for another way of being, are condemned. The tactics that will finally disenfranchise them and their supporters from a future

Christian America are left unmentioned, but the rhetoric makes it plain that there will not be a place for them. And these preachers warn that if America does not act soon to repress the lifestyles of gays and lesbians. God will punish the nation.

When Pat Robertson was asked by Jerry Falwell if God. had lowed the attacks on September 11, both the question and its answer stoked this fear of divine wrath and apocalyptic judgment: *I*

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Should another catastrophic

occur, what will prevent these

preachers from calling for the punishment, detention and quaran-tining of gays and lesbians-as well as abortionists, Muslims and other nonbelievers-to safeguard the nation? What will stanch the hate crimes and physical attacks against those deemed immoral by fearful and angry Christians, those condemned by these preachers *as* responsible for the nation's abandonment by God? How will the nation function rationally if homeland

depends on an elu-

sive piety as interpreted by the Christian Right? And most ominously, the fringe groups of the Christian Right believe they have been mandated by God to carry out Christian terrorism, annointed to murder doctors who perform abortions and godless Muslims in Iraq. In a time of anxiety and chaos, of overwhelming fear and un-

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certainty, how many more will be prodded by this talk of divine vengeance to join the ranks of these Christian extremists?

The drive to ban same-sex marriages in the 2004 election was just one step in a campaign to strip gays and lesbians of civil rights. A 1996 federal law already defines marriage as a union curring between a man and a woman. Currently 19 states have written prohibitions on

marriage into their state

stitutions. As of this writing the latest were passed in Kansas and Texas in 2005; 13 states adopted constitutional bans on gay marriage in 2004, while four had previous bans. At least seven states will hold statewide votes on

marriage bans in

These referendums fan the fires of fear and hatred. Bans have to be passed, believers are told, so "activist judges" will not ovenum the laws forbidding same-sex marriages. The Christian Right, with its constant need for scapegoats and satanic enemies to be defeated, use the state referendums to mobilize and gize followers, even as the most pressing social ills of the country are ignored.

Any relationships outside the rigid, traditional model of male and female threaten the hierarchical male power structure to

the movement. Women who do not depend on men for their identity and their sexuality, who live outside a male power ship, challenge the cult of masculinity, as do men who find tenderness and love with men as equals. The lifestyle of gays and lesbians is intolerable to the Christian Right

their exis-

tence is a threat to the movement's chain of command, one its leaders insist was ordained by God.

The Reverend Dr. Mel White, who produced films and worked with most of the prominent leaders within the Christian Right, came out as a gay man in 1993 in his installation as dean at the Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches Cathedral of Hope church in Dallas. Uke many gay men in the church, he struggled until late in life with his homosexuality, demning himself for feelings and inclinations he could not control.

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"Conservative Christians shaped the very core of my faith and passed on to me my love for Jesus, the Bible. and the church,"

White wrote in his autobiography,

at

Gate: To Be Gay

"But all through those wonderful days of

hood and early adolescence, a heavy layer ofdouds floated between me and the heavens. In spite of their many gifts to me, those same conservative Christians remained silent about the longings of

my heart. And though 1 was surrounded by their loving presence, that same silence left me feeling increasingly isolated and lonely. In the days of my gay childhood, there *was* no one who even tried to help clear up my growing confusion, guilt, and fear."

White's grandmother was a tent revival preacher, traveling around the country on

to preach and set up storefront

churches. When White was 12 years old. she told him that she had given up sex with her husband to "work for the Kingdom." "Jesus is coming soon," she told White. "Don't be by anything."II

White was a model Christian youth. He worked to save the souls of his friends and classmates. He was the student body president at his high school.

"In those early years,l thought for certain that my secret longings were a sign that my Creator had abandoned me," White wrote.12

White would lie awake, "begging God to heal me, to take away the feelings I could not understand, to make me like the rest of them once and for all. It was a prayer I had prayed hundreds of times before. I prayed it in my junior high gym when we showered together and I was terrified by my

physical response to

the other naked boys. I prayed it at the beach when I lay with my fellow surfers in the sand and was aroused by their bodies. I prayed it when I was alone in my room at night, cutting out ads from bodybuilding magazines and hiding them under my

In high school, White began to date Lyla Lee Loehr, whom he had known since seventh grade. White took Loehr, for their first date, to a Youth for Christ rally. He knew he could never bring her

Testament

be

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Lyla

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home to his parents-she wasn't saved. But after a few weeks of spending time together at White's church, she accepted Christ into her life.

White struggled to conform to a "heterosexual lifestyle. " His new girlfriend was the ticket out of sin.

"By then I had memorized the Old

lines from

Leviticus that say a man who sleeps with another man is an abomination and should

killed," he wrote.

I thought

that God still loved me, I wasn't certain how far God's love would go if! ever 'gave in' to my 'evil passions:" l.

White married Loehr and raised two children. He had a successful career in the church. He watched passively, however, as colleagues in the church struggled with homosexuality, suffered mental breakdowns or committed suicide. One such troubled man cut off his testicles.

When White's younger brother was struck and killed by a car while riding his bicycle, White wondered if this was a message from God.

"There were desperate, irrational times when I thought maybe God was punishing me for my homosexual thoughts by letting my brother die," he wrote.IS

White, like many in the church, saw a series of Christian psychologists and psychiatrists. The first told him he needed to tell his wife. He did.

agreed to help. White wanted to keep his

family and career. He wanted to conquer his homosexuality.

"For the next years, I read and memorized biblical texts on faith. I fasted and prayed for healing. I believed that God had

'healed me' or was 'in the process of healing me: But over the long haul, my sexual orientation didn't change. My natural attraction to other men never lessened. After months of trying, my psychiatrist implied that I wasn't really cooperating with the Spirit of God. After that, my guilt and fear just escalated."

In 1977, White began his first relationship with another homosexual man. The relationship lasted for a year, but the secrecy

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caused emotional strain. At the same time, he began ghostwriting for Francis Schaeffer, Jerry Falwell. D. James Kennedy, Pat Robertson and other Christian Right leaders.

"I wasn't wise enough to anticipate where aU this talk of

'cleansing the nation' might lead. I didn't foresee that one day those same religious

personalities and the political groups they

would

could

a dangerous threat to me, to my gay

brothers and lesbian sisters. and to all

who might disagree

with their political. religious and social agenda for our country." I?

He contemplated suicide while scuba diving in Hawaii and later atop a bridge. He saw more Christian counselors. and in spair slashed his wrists with a coat hanger as his wife screamed at him to stop. It was the end of their marriage. White met his ner, Gary Nixon, who sang in the church choir. He walked away from one world and into another. It became his mission to ment the hate talk of his former employers and

gay and

lesbian Christians to denounce the bigotry of the Christian Right.

is a black and white world," White says. "It is between good and evil. It is not a natural political conflict where people of good will can disagree, and they're playing the political game beautifully. They pretend that it's a political game, whereas in it's a fight between God and Satan. They don't ever say that. So they have taken the political process, and used it fairly against us.

They've won the Congress and the presidency, and they're about to win the courts because of their Congress and the president.

They've won state houses across the country and precincts where by the political process. So they have done what we didn't do. They have a system to throw democracy out the window.

"They want to end homosexuality in America," he says, "... one step at a time, first the federal marriage amendment, and then comes no adoption, no service in the military, the reinstatement of the sodomy laws and driving us back intO our closets, or worse.

They do not want to compromise, but they begin with compromise after compromise after compromise."

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Persecution

The advance, White says, is demoralizing the gay community, which he warns

losing the will to fight.

"It's safer back in the closet anyway, and since we can pass, or the gay leaders can pass, the ones who wear suits and have good jobs and have plenty of money, they will go underground," he *says.* "It is the gay people out there in the hinterlands who have no options. They are being rejected by their families, discarded by their parents, kicked out of their jobs, harassed, outed and killed.

The gay leaders don't have a clue about this suffering.

"There are no fountains or cafeterias or bus stations we can integrate," White says. "There are no symbols that we can attack.

Marriage, the one great act of defiance, in San Francisco and Massachusetts showed to the country gay couples lined up to get married. This is something they didn't like. The faces looked maL They had children. These pictures were killing the tures. That, for me, is one of the great things we've done, just go to get married no matter what.

"What frightens me most are gay people who don't stand what's happening and who are unwilling to take a he says. "Once *they* take away our rights they're going to start wanting to register us because we're the ones who have the most sexually transmitted diseases. *They're* going to say, 'We want to register *you* so we can give *you* special medical attention.' Quar-antine comes next, along with taking away our children, the children we've adopted. They will take away the pannership rights the corporations put in place, because they can put pressure on the corporations. *My* bleakest description is that we'll not only be driven back into our closets, but we'll have to leave the country.

Right now, we have to leave the state of

because of the

law that says we can't have any agreements, or any contracts, or any powers of attorney that represent marriage. So every gay person who has a business here lives in fear."

The attack against gays and lesbians seeks to paint homosexual behavior as a form of barbarity, one step above bestiality. Gays

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time

and lesbians, like other enemies of Christ, are not fully human; they are "unnatural." And in this assault there is often lurid fasci-nation with the grittier details of homosexual encounters. Peter LaBarbera is the executive director of the Illinois Family Institute, based in Glen Ellyn. Illinois, and a speaker who uses this rhetoric to depict gays as depraved. He denies the possibility of loving, committed relationships between gays and lesbians. He brands the lifestyle as one of "extreme promiscuity," saying that homosexuals call it monogamy, it's not real monogamy." And sexual relations itself between gays and lesbians is, he insists, "gross, unnatural and dangerous behavior,"

He warns about what he calls "the totalitarian impulse of a gay man." He vidously attacks National Gay and Lesbian Task Force director Matt Foreman, who has criticized ex-gay therapies and the role some members of the clergy play in pushing gay men to these ex-gay groups.

LaBarbera calls on the crowd to "stop backing up in the face of homosexual cultural aggression." It is

to fight, he insists.

And then he hints ominously at what he would like to see happen, how he would like to see Christians battle in ways, perhaps outside the law, that are no longer "nice," how he would like to take this war to the streets.

"We need a good cop, bad cop strategy...." he says. "We've been too nice. We need to have some people go over and do the tough things, like the other side does."

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CHAPTER SIX

The War on Truth

Before they seize power and establish a world according to their doctrines, totalitarian movements conjure up a lying world of consistency which is more adequate to the needs of the human mind than reality itself; in which. through sheer imagination, uprooted masses can feel at home and are spared the never-ending shocks which real life and real experiences deal to human beings and

expectations. The force possessed by totalitarian propaganda-before the movements have the power to drop iron curtains to prevent anyone's

by the slightest reality,

the gruesome quiet of an entirely imaginary world-lies in its ability to shut the masses off from the real world.

The Origins ofTotalitarianism'

On themiddleofthelobbyoftheSO.OOO-square-footCreation Museum in

Kentucky. tumbles a 2o-foot water-

fall. Two life-size figures of children with

black hair and

wearing buckskin clothes play in the stream a few feet from two towering

models that move and roar. The mu-

seum has a scale model of Noah's ark, which shows how dinosaurs fit into the three levels of the vessel, along with other species such as horses. giraffes. hippopotamuses. penguins and bears. It boasts an elaborate display of the Garden of Eden in which Adam and Eve. naked but strategically positioned not to show it, swim in a river as dinosaurs and giant

roam the

banks. Before Adam and Eve were expelled from paradise, museum visitors are informed, all of the dinosaurs were peaceable plant eaters. The evidence, they are told. is found in Genesis 1:30, in which God gives

herb" to every creature to eat. There

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were no predators. Only after Adam and Eve sinned and were cast out of

did the dinosaurs start to eat flesh. And Adam's

sin is a key component of the belief system, for in the eyes of many creationists, in order for Jesus' death to be meaningful it had to atone for that sin.

The museum has a theater equipped with seats that shake and gadgets that spray mist at the audience as the story of God's six-day creation of the world unfolds on the screen and the sound system

the auditorium. There are 3D-foot-high walls

represent the cliffs of the Grand Canyon, floors that resemble rocks embedded with fossils, and rooms where a "Christian" paleontologist counters the claims of an "evolutionist" paleontologist.

It has the appearance of a real science museum, complete with a planetarium, a gift shop, and plaques on the wall with quotes from creationist "scientists" who have the title "Doctor"

uously before their names. It has charts, time lines, and graphs with facts and figures. It is meant to be interactive, to create, like Universal Studios, a contrived reality with an array of costly matronic men and women, as well as looming dinosaurs. It is part of the drive to make real a

world, a world of

miracles and magic.

"We take as our philosophy that the whole museum will prove that God's word is true," says Jean Ampt, who leads the tour through the museum.

The danger of creationism is not that it allows followers to retreat into a world of

and magic-which it does-but that

it allows all facts to be accepted or discarded according to the dictates of a preordained ideology. Creationism removes the follower from the

reality·based world. Signs, miracles, and won-

ders occur not only in the daily life of Christians, but also in history, science, medicine and logic. This belief system becomes the basis for understanding the world, and random facts or data are collected and made to fit into the belief system. If facts can't be made to fit, they

discarded or treated as misguided opinions.

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When facts are treated as if they were opinions, when there is no universal standard by which to determine truth in law, in science, in scholarship, or in the reporting of the events of the day, the world becomes a place where lies become true, where people can believe what they want to believe, where there is no possibility of reaching any conclusion not predetermined by those who pret the official, divinely inspired text.

The museum illustrates the movement's marriage of primitive intolerance with the modern tools of technology, mass communi·

cation, sophisticated fund-raising and political organization. To·

talitarian systems usually start as propagandistic movements that ostensibly teach people to "believe what they want," but that opening

is a ruse. This insistence on the primacy of per-

sonal opinion regardless of facts destabilizes and destroys the primacy of all fact. This process leads inevitably to the big lie. Facts are useful only if they bolster the message. The use of mass-marketing techniques to persuade rather than brainwash allows millions of followers to accept the toxic totalitarian line, having been tricked into believing it's their own. Ironically, at the outset the movement seemingly encourages people to think "independently" or "courageously." It presents its ideology of creationism, repackaged as "intelligent design," as an alternative to Darwinian theories of evolution. The power of these non·reality-based movements is that they appeal to our deepest-held, most primitive prejudices, our classism, sexism, racism-perversions based on fear of complexity or change. So the propaganda contains much of what we already yeam to believe. Its subversive message is that it's OK to believe what we want, to believe lies.

In the promulgation of the totalitarian belief

at first

we are told we all have a right to an opinion, in short, a right to believe anything. Soon, under the iron control of an empowered totalitarian movement, facts become worthless, kept or discarded according to an ideological litmus test. Lies become true. And once the totalitarians are in power, facts are ruthlessly rnanipu·

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laced or kept hidden to support the lie. Hannah Arendt called the principle behind this process "nihilistic relativism.» The goal of creationism is not to offer an alternative. Its goal is the destruction of the core values of the open society-the ability to think for oneself, to draw independent conclusions, to express dissent when judgment and common sense tell you something is wrong.

to be self-critical, to challenge authority, to advocate for change and to accept that there are other views, different ways of being, that are morally and socially acceptable.

The museum will cost an estimated $25 million. It is the work of Ken Ham, a schoolteacher. one of the country's leading creationists. Other creationist museums are going up in Arkansas.

Texas. California, Tennessee and Florida. The museum is part of a massive push to teach creationism in schools, championed by a vast Christian publishing and filmmaking industry that seeks to rewrite the past and make

it conform to the Bible. The front lines of the culture wars are the classrooms, and the battle is one reality-based educators are slowly losing. Twenty states are consider-ing changing the way evolution is taught in order to include creationism or intelligent design.1 Intelligent design has been the code word of the movement since the Supreme Court ruled in the *1987 Edwards*

Aguillard case that creationism cannot be taught in public schools. Intelligent design argues that the slow of evolution could not have produced something as complex as the living cell. Rather, life was created by an

agent,"

one the proponents of intelligent design are careful to specify is unknown, in order to skirt the judicial ban on creationism. Several states, including Pennsylvania, now have state education charters requiring that students be taught the evidence for

and against" evolution-although there is no scientific evidence against it. And many Americans buy into the myth. When asked for their views on human origins, only 13 percent of respondents in a 2004 Gallup poll said life arose from the strictly natural process of evolution. More than 38 percent believed God guided

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evolution, and 45 percent said the Genesis account of creation was a true story.l Courses on intelligent design have been taught at the universities of Minnesota, Georgia, New

and Iowa

State, along with Wake Forest and Carnegie Mellon. not to mention Christian universities that teach all science through the prism of the Bible.

When Charles Lyell's

of

was published in

1830-1833. it challenged the prevailing views of how Earth had been formed. Lyell questioned the assumption that unique catastrophes or supernatural events-such as Noah's flood-shaped Earth's surface. He wrote that a once tumultuous period of change had slowed to today's calmer, more leisurely pace. The date of the Earth's sudden creation. up until then, had been widely accepted as 4004 Be based on the creation story in Genesis. When Charles Darwin published *The Origin of* in 1859,

his findings funher eroded the biblical account ofcreation. Lyell's and Darwin's works were catastrophic for biblical literalists. Evolution and natural selection shattered the comfortable worldview of many Christians, who saw themselves as created in the image of God. Evolution reduced the human race to the status of a species, one descended from primates. The scientific accounts of creation and the origin of species became in the eyes of fundamentalist believers the materialist foundation for the human race's moral and cultural decline. It dethroned Christians from their se1f-construeted platform of moral and ethical superiority. It challenged the belief that God intervenes in human affairs to protect and guide believers. The ideological pillars of literalist Christianity. which viewed the universe as revolving around and serving the interests of anointed Christians, were destroyed.

Literalist Christians believe that death did not exist before Adam and Eve were expelled from the Garden of Eden for dis-obeying God. Death and suffering were introduced by God as a punishment for living in a sinful, fallen world. Jesus' suffering and crucifixion. however, atoned for Adam's sin and made possible a

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return to a deathless paradise. But if the Darwinian account of evolution is

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and suffering were always and al-

ways will be a part of human existence. Evolution implicitly challenges the possibility of miracles. the Second Coming of Christ, the Resurrection, and an apocalyptic end to human existence in which the saved are lifted up into heaven. For believers who have found in the certitude of Christian fundamentalism a shelter from despair, a despair that

to consume them again if they re-

turn to a reality-based world. evolution is terrifying. The miracles they insist they see performed around them, the presence of the guiding, comforting hand of God in their lives, the notion that there is a divine destiny specially preordained for them, crumbles into dust under the cold glare of evolution. Evolution posits what they fear most: a morally neutral universe. It obliterates the fantastic constructs of their belief system. And the steady efforts by creationists to erode the authority of evolution and discredit Darwin are, because of all this, unrelenting and fierce.

"Unlike the animals, mammals included, man is an immortal being who will live somewhere

reads a passage in

Living *Creation,* a creationist textbook popular in Christian high schools. Human beings are discussed in isolation from other mammals, and brief passages interrupt the chapters with headings such as "The Wonders of the Human Hand." "Only an omnipotent and all-wise God could have designed and created the human hand,'" students read. Computers can never think, students are told, because "No machine will ever know satisfaction at discovering God's truth.

The textbook, with an

of

ture references, states that "according to the laws of probability, the probability that evolution occurred is essentially zero. Yet, evolutionists believe sincerely that it did somehow happen. We marvel at their faith in the impossible.'"

Creationist publications such as this one blame Darwin for spawning most of the evils of modernity including racism,8

Stalinism,'Q the Holocaustll and the Rwandan gena-

cide. 12 It was evolution, the textbook states, that "exploded into a worldwide philosophy of 'kill or be killed' as expressed by Adolf Hitler and the proponents of the religion of Communism." 13 Darwin is usually presented as mentally unbalanced and sadistic. An article put out by the California-based Institute for Creation Research is typical: "Was Charles Darwin Psychotic? A Study of His Mental Health."

Believers are told that Darwin, and all evolu-

tionists, were behind the genocides unleashed by all modern tyrants from Hitler and Stalin to Pol Pot.1S And Christians must be prepared for battle, for war, against satanic forces that lie incubat-ing within America's secular, evolutionist, materialistic, godless society, forces getting ready to begin a new round of mass minations, this time of American Christians.

Darwin, students learn, suffered from deep depression, alienation and constant illness and physical pain once he defied God and published his work. He could not escape divine wrath. "He lost all interest in the higher

things of life. the things about man that can only be explained by his being a creature made in the image of God," the textbook reads. "He lost his love for poetry, music, and literature, and, of course, he could not pray." 17

And yet, coming from the modem age, the fundamentalists cannot discount science. They employ jargon, methods and data that appear like science to make an argument for creationism.

They have created research and scholarly institutions designed to parallel legitimate scientific organizations. They pump out articles in self-published journals to provide "evidence" that homosexuals can be cured, that global warming is a myth, that abortion can cause breast cancer, that something they call "postabortion syn-drome" leads to deep depression and suicide, and that abstinence-only education is an effective form of birth control. Bogus and unsubstantiated claims, all in the

of the ideology, are

dressed up to look scientific. This pseudoscience seeps into the public debate, disseminated by a nervous media anxious to give both sides of every argument. Those with contempt for and

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truth. for honest research and inquiry, are given the same platform as those who deal in a world of reality, fact and rationality. The movement's leaders dress up this ideology as scientific to discredit real science. They have created a "fundamentalist science." They cannOt return to the

innocence that let their prede-

cessors believe the Bible alone was enough. They need, the

midst of their flight from reality, to be reassured that science-science not contaminated by secular humanists and nonbelievers-is on their side. In this they are a distinctly modem movement. They need the imprint of science and scholarship to

myth.

This is a characteristic they share with all modern totalitarian movements, which work hard to co-opt the disciplines of law, science, medicine and scholarship to give to their primitive and su-perstitious belief systems. systems that allow the rulers to dictate reality and troth, a modem veneer. The "paraprofessional"

zations formed by the Christian Right-organizations of teachers, journalists, doctors, lawyers and scientists-mimic the activities of traditional professional groups (groups in which the focus really is the profession and not the faith). They seek to challenge the legitimacy and power of these traditional organizations. The duplica-tion

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nontotalitarian world, as Arendt wrote, "proved extremely fruitful in the work of undermining actively existing institutions and in the 'decomposition of the status quo; which totalitarian organizations invariably prefer to an open show offorce." 18

The Creation Museum presents the creationist argument that Adam and Eve were human beings and that God created everything on the earth in six 24-hour days. Adherents to this worldview do not believe that the earth has existed for millions ofyears or that the fust living cell appeared 3,5 billion years ago or that the dinosaurs roamed the planet for 160 million years before becoming extinct, their reign ending abrupdy. They scoff at the notion that the dinosaurs could, as biologists suggest, be the ancestors of birds. Instead, they embrace a strict 6,OOO-year

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chronology of the Bible. Men and dinosaurs coexisted and were created during the same

cycle, wholly and fully evolved.

When the biblical flood covered the earth, dinosaurs, along with other species, were sheltered on Noah's ark. The rest of the dinosaurs were drowned in the flood, and this, as the museum's exhibits explain, accounts for the vast tracts of fossilized dinosaur bones. Animals on the ark, including the dinosaurs, repopulated after disembarking, but environmental

changes meant that the dinosaurs could not adapt and died off. The biblical accounts of sea monsters, leviathans and behemoths are, according to the museum's displays, references to dinosaurs. They do not give credence to the concept of the big bang because Genesis states that God created waters and Earth on the third day, and the sun, moon and stars on the fourth day. It is a story hardly more credible than the fantasy of a child, but it fulfills a powerful emotional need.

Bible tells us that God created all of the land animals on the sixth day of creation," a brochure from the museum reads.

dinosaurs were land animals, they must have been made on this day, alongside Adam and Eve, who

also created on Day Six

(Genesis 1:24-31). If God designed and created dinosaurs, they would have been fully functional, designed to do what they were created for, and would have been 100 percent dinosaur. This fits exactly with the evidence from the fossil

The museum devotes much of its space to trumpeting what it insists are discrepancies in the scientific search for the origins of life. The dearth of fossil ancestors for major life-forms after the

"Cambrian explosion" about 550 million years ago, for example, is used by creationists to discredit evolution, although science furnishes a range of persuasive explanations for the paucity of fossils-for example, that primitive

before the Cambrian

period lacked hard body parts that could have been fossilized. The fact that we have any fossils of larger life-forms is an amazing piece of luck, since they can

only in quite specific geologic

conditions. But all this is used against science. And a mantra of

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creationists, one the museum guide repeats a few times. is: is not a God of gaps."

The creationists act and look like scientists. They couch their language in the jargon of science. They say they can disprove the theory of evolution *with* facts and evidence. They talk of research and data. It is not enough these days to argue that God wrote the story of Creation and therefore it is true. The movement needs the veneer of science. This is the goal of the museum. Science will prove the biblical account of creation and the literal interpretation of the Bible. Creationism must be defended in a scientific manner, with scientific conclusions disproving the "theory" of evolution and supporting the words of the Bible. Once the "science" of creationism is accepted, the Bible reigns as the undisputed word of God and the sole arbiter of truth. Leaders who interpret the Bible must be obeyed. Creationism is a key part of a system aimed at building a society that relinquishes the capacity to examine itself.

Museum displays say there is no proof that fossils are millions of years old. Evolution, in the hands of creationists, becomes just another unsubstantiated story about the past since scientist

was there to see the dinosaurs live through this supposed dinosaur age."

"Some people think that dinosaurs were too big, or there were too many of them, to go on this ark," a museum display reads. It goes on to explain that

in fact there were very few different kinds of dinosaurs. And then there is the speculation that perhaps not all the dinosaurs were full-grown when they mounted Noah's gangplank. "Even though there was ample room in the huge ship for large animals," the museum material explains, "perhaps God sent young adults into the ark that still had plenty of room for them to grow."

We stand in a display room called "the dig site." In front of us is a replica of a pit with the

of fossilized bones of the

dinosaur. The room is meant to explore, from the biblical tive the work of paleontologists.

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administration.”[20]

The paleontologist "creates a story based on her assumption about 'millions ofyears' of earth history with the help of artists and sculptors," reads the sign

the dig site.

transforms the

story into 'believable history' that appears in films, books and papers. The room shows how the false assumptions of evolutionary scientists end up 'as facts' in our public schools and museums."

This pseudoscience is part of a wider assault on all scientific studies that challenge the radical fundamentalist worldview.

There are Christian scientists who challenge research regarding global warming, AIDS, and pregnancy prevention. Christian Right organizations such as the

Values Coalition, whose

founder, Paul Cameron, once called for AIDS "leper colonies," 19

are lobbying to end all programs by the National Institutes of Health related to HIV infection. Members of the Christian Right, positioned inside government agencies, have worked to discredit or silence research by public health officials and censored data that conflict with the radical fundamentalist vision, especially garding birth control.

Self-appointed Christian "experts" produce glossy studies to displace genuine research. Joe Mcllhaney, one of the most prominent compilers of this pseudoscience, has published a brochure.

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Aren't Safe. which uses discredited science to prove that condoms do not work. The number of pseudoscientists peddling falsehoods inside the government is part of what triggered the Union of Concerned Scientists in March 2004 to write in its repon

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"There is significant evi-

dence that the scope and scale of the manipulation, suppression, and misrepresentation of science by the Bush administration are unprecedented. . . .

scientific institutions such

as the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the National Institutes of Health take decades to build a team of world-class scientific expertise and talent. But they can be severely damaged in short order by the scientifically unethical behavior such as that displayed by the current

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One of the final displays in the museum shows how "a con-temporary family experiences daily life without God. It portrays a household in disarray. with fights and teenager drug use. Ucen-tiousness. alcohol abuse and the breakdown of parental authority are tied to the failure to believe in the creation myth. In this gloomy section of the museum, there is also a darkened, graffiti-covered alley and a sign that asks: 'What happens when absolute authority is eliminated and man's opinion is the only measure of good and evil?"

walk through an inner-city alley is the backdrop for a virtual and auditory display of the horrors of a culture that had made man's opinion the final authority in life," another sign reads.

These displays depict women and men out of control, hooked on drugs, sexually promiscuous, suffering in the stench of a modern Sodaro and Gomorrah.

Numerous books purport to offer scientific evidence to back up creationism. including the SSO-page

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thored by Henry M. Morris and John Whitcomb. The book. published in 1961. has gone through 40 printings and is the movement's opening manifesto, the first assault by creationists against evolution from a "scientific" position. It seeks to layout

"evidence" to suppOrt the biblical account of creation, attacking an array of research methods that are usually obscure to the lay reader, such as the modern methods of radiometric dating. The authors write off modern research tools as unreliable and trumpet contradictory studies within the scientific community about sues such as the age of the Earth. The heavy use of scientific jargon gives the work a scholarly appearance.

a graduate of Princeton, where he arrived in 1942 as godless evolutionist," had a conversion experience as a fresh-man. He interrupted college to serve in the army in World War II, including the Battle of the Bulge. and returned

to complete his gree and attend Grace Theological Seminary. He stayed at the seminary for nearly forty years to teach Old Testament. He has spent

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his life peddling creationism. Soft-spoken, good-humored, he rat-tles off his theories with the aid of an overhead projector that shows time lines for the account of creation, diagrams of the planets and measurements ofNoah's ark. The morning I find him Independence, Missouri, his audience is made up of several hundred Christian schoolteachers from Midwestern states, They take notes and laugh as he pokes fun at or appears to puncture the research of secular scientists. The audience, at times, is giddy with excitement.

Whitcomb assures the teachers they will be amassing the scientific ammunition to demolish the work of geologists, biologists and paleontologists who dismiss the creation account in the Bible.

"Now you say, 'Lord, you don't really expect intelligent, scientifically-minded people to believe that, that the whole universe was created in six days, do you?'" Whitcomb asks, "And God says,

'Dear reader, I have written a chapter in the Bible called Genesis 1.

And it's called a time block, which means it is not fluffy, frothy and cannot be manipulated, stretched or accommodated:"

Whitcomb brings up some of the stickier problems in Genesis, such as the account that God

light on the first day and the

sun on the fourth day. He posits that God created a "temporary"

light until the sun was formed, The reason for this, Whitcomb explains, is that God wanted to abolish the cult of sun worship.

"And don't think for one minute America has abandoned sun worship, either in public school textbooks, which starts this way on how the world began: 'Billions of years ago, solar radiation bathed the primeval seas and somehow activated lifeless chemicals and coalesced them into highly complex, self-reproducing ganisms that have evolved under solar radiation for billions of years, and as long as the sun keeps shining, life will continue, and when the sun dies out, life ends.' What you have just heard was a sun-worship service.

"Friends," Whitcomb concludes, "it took no work at all for Jesus to do this, But astronomers in their debates and arguments on a horizontal, rationalistic level will never discover the

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answer. Don't expect any textbooks. in any university, as long as the world goes on as it is. to ever, ever come to the right conclusion. Only the infallible. inspired. inerrant, unique written tion of God has the answers."

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is met with rapturous applause. The teachers close their notebooks. and several hurry forward to ask more questions or buy books, many by Whitcomb, on the table outside the door.

Similar seminars are being held *by* creationists around the country. On an April night at Pennview Christian School in erton, Pennsylvania, about a half hour outside of Philadelphia, Dr.

Jason Lisle. who works for the Creation Museum, sets up his slide projector for a lecture. He begins his presentation by disabusing his audience of about 150 people, mostly students. teachers and parents. of the notion that dinosaurs were frightful creatures.

"God didn't make monsters," he says, explaining his theory of the dinosaurs' diet. "The first T. *rex* would have eaten plants. Dinosaurs, along with all animals originally, were vegetarians.

"People say, 'Wait a minute-but

rex has those incredibly

sharp teeth.' And indeed, T. *rex* had six-inch serrated fangs-perfectly designed for ripping and tearing into watermelons and can-taloupes and cabbages and all kinds of fruits.

"You see, you think of a watermelon as soft. But order to

get to the soft stuff on the inside, you have to cut through the hard outer exterior. But not T. *rex.* He was quite ready to eat it off the vine."

lisle shows fanciful slides to the audience of raptors and stegosauruses outfitted with saddles, a caveman fighting an infant T. *rex,* and Adam and Eve strolling in the Garden of Eden alongside triceratops.

"Dinosaurs were docile. gentle, when they were first created,"

says Lisle. "All Bfe's animals would have been gentle when they were first created."

"People say, 'Wait a minute. Wouldn't *T. rex* try to eat people-to eat Adam and Eve?'" Lisle asks. But he blames the question

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on "anti·God, humanistic-based evolution movies" like *Park.*

"I'm not saying it's wrong for you to see movies like that. But you need to

about things when you watch things like that.

How do I process this from the biblical worldview? Is this really accurate?"

He tells the students he did not admit he was a creationist to his professors at Ohio Wesleyan, or at Colorado where he received his PhD in astrophysics. He speaks of the dilemma faced by creationists at secular

schools, urging that students not "come out" until after graduate school. "Some professors will just stop you from getting your PhD if you're a creationist."

Lisle's final image on the screen shows a small church with a cross on its roof. Next to it is a large white cross. The large cross has the words "The Church" emblazoned on it. A network of white tree roots, labeled "Creation," secures "The Church" to the earth. Lisle explains that secular science is attacking the biblical view of creation. In his drawing is a salvo of cruise missiles with phrases

= Man," "Millions of Years" and "Evolution"

printed on their sides as they head in an arch toward the roots.

These attacks, he says, are aimed to bring down the cross, to stroy the church.

He shows a slide picturing a small hut with a radar dish on the roof. The hut is labeled

in Genesis," the church's

early warning system. He flips to a new slide.

The church begins firing lasers---emitted from its cross-at the incoming missiles. The cascade oflaser beams strikes the missiles, causing them-and their blasphemies-to erupt into flames.

"Come to the Cross and be saved!" proclaims the final slide.1]

All attempts to seek truth, however elusive and difficult, challenge the blind obedience and suppression of conscience championed by those who teach one "truth" and one way of being. When only one "truth" is allowed, empirical data becomes irrelevant. Intellectual, scientific and moral inquiry becomes unnecessary. In 128

this new world followers are robbed of the capacity to think. The lies, however enormous and absurd, defy criticism and unmask·

ing because the rational world is discredited and finally silenced.

The Creation Museum. standing with its imposing pillars, its sea of parking lots for school buses. 52 acres of groomed landscaping, pond, looping nature trails, animatronic dinosaurs and "Christian" paleontologists. presages a society where truth is banished.

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CHAPTER SEVEN

The New Class

To tell men that they

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sentimental appeal.

But this appeal is small compared with that made by a propaganda that tells them they are superior to others. and that ers are inferior to them.

The Open Society and Its Enemies, *Vol.* I'

he elevator at the Hilton Hotel in Anaheim, California, fills floor by floor, as it descends with delegates for the tional Religious Broadcasters annual convention. There is a slighdy forced camaraderie and an awkward cheerfulness as we head down to the lobby. People glance quickly at the plastic name tags on one another's chests. They smile as new passengers step inside and say good morning. They sprinkle the words of the converted into their banter, talking about how "blessed" they are to be here, beginning brief dialogues with phrases such as

"Where is your ministry?" and ending them with "Praise the Lord." This call-and-response is a form of initiation, an easy way to draw the lines between themselves and nonbelievers, to establish the parameters of their exclusive community. All subcultures have their linguistic codes of identification. This new class is no exception.

The convention has brought together some 5.500 Christian broadcasters from radio and television, who reach, according to their figures, an estimated 141 million listeners and viewers across America. And they see themselves as both the persecuted and the powerful. These twin themes run through the event. They are both threatened by conspiratorial forces that seek to destroy them and empowered by the certainty of Christ's return. These

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emotions bond them together as a crowd, as comrades in the battle against the godless.

Southern California. along with Colorado Springs, is one of the epicenters of the radical movement. Numerous television evangelists. including the

Jimmy and Tammy Faye Bakker, got

their

in these huge, soulless exurbs. These large developed tracts of housing are isolated, devoid of neighborhood gathering places, community rituals and routines. even of sidewalks. The isolation, coupled with the long, lonely commutes in a car; the cold, impersonal world of the corporate office; and the banal, in-cessant chatter of talk radio and television create numbness and disorientation. This destruction of community is one of the factors that has led to the rise of the Christian Right. The megachurches, which have prospered in these environments. have become surrogate communities, places where people can find clubs to pursue common interests, friends, a sense of belonging, and moral

In these sprawling churches, which often look

like shopping or convention centers, believers are reassured, told that affluence is blessed by God-a sign of their righteousness and the righteousness of their nation-and that in the embrace of the church they have a place, a home.

There is a Starbucks in the Hilton Hotel lobby. Dee Simmons from Dallas is waiting to order a coffee. Around her neck she is wearing a gold cross studded with diamonds, and on her face, smooth and unwrinkled, makeup is artfully applied. The line of men and women, in from and behind us, is conservatively dressed in

or coats and ties. They are about to head into the tion hall next door. Simmons and a friend, Samantha Landy, with red hair, are chatty and friendly.

In 1987, Simmons says, she was diagnosed with breast cancer and had a "modified radical mastectomy." Five years later her mother died of cancer. These events led her, she says, to turn her focus away from the designer dothes boutiques she owned in Dallas and New York to nutrition.

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"When God gave me my life back, I decided to make a difference in people's lives." she says.

She reaches into her purse and pulls out some pamphlets for Ultimate Living. her company. She tells me about her books, including

Natural

to *Healthy Living,* and mentions the nu-

merous Christian talk shows she regularly appears on. including Pat Robertson's

700 Club. as well as *Hope Today,*

thing

Tonight and the *Armstrong*

Show.

"I was saved and found Christ when I was 3," she says. "I'm 64. My daughter is 36."

She appears to wait for the effect of her age, which she will repeat a few more times, to sink in.

"I also have skin care products which are all natural," she says.

am on *Living the Life* once or twice a month, the show with Terry Meeuwsen. who was Miss America. There is a huge crossover with my nutrition work. Everyone is interested in nutrition, even nonbelievers. I use organically grown papayas. I have eight laboratories where I make Green Miracle. Green Miracle combines greens and roots that are ground up. They have all the vital nutrients. I sen it at cancer hospitals. It is good for diabetes, heart disease, immune support, hormone problems, any issue, realIy."

Landy tells me she runs "Christian celebrity luncheons" in Palm Springs as part of her work of "salvation outreach for snow-birds." Her ministry, she says, focuses on country dubs and golf courses, places "where people do not often hear the word of God.

"A lot of people go to churches and assume the pastor has a personal relationship with Christ," she says, "but they often do not. I bring in

celebrity speakers like Gavin

he was the

Captain on *Love Boat;* and Rhonda Fleming, she was in over 40

films and starred with Bing Crosby-speakers who have realIy accomplished things in the world who are Christian. Rhonda Fleming did her own stunts."

Her list of Christian celebrities available to speak includes Donna Douglas from the

Hillbillies; Ann B. Davis, who was

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Alice on *The*

Bunch; and Lauren Chapin. who played Kathy on *Father Knows Best.*

"Tell him about the wedding." Landy prompts.

Simmons's daughter recently got married in Dallas. The ding was filmed for broadcast on a show called

Dallas. She

urges me to watch it. The wedding theme, she says, was Palace: Her Majesty the Queen." There were 500 guests who ered in a building known as the HaIl o[State and "flowers from all over the world." She says she would rather not mention the cost.

Her husband-who, she says, is "very, very wealthy," adding "I don't need to work"-refers, she says. to the wedding expense as

"the national debt."

"Her husband is quite a bit older," Landy interjects.

"There was a huge fireworks display," Simmons says. "but I am too embarrassed to tell you how much it cost. When the fireworks stopped, a quartet sang 'God Bless America: There was a saxophone solo. Everyone had

was awesome," Landy says.

The cake took three months to make. There were jewels and semiprecious stones both on the cake and in the bridal bouquet.

Both had to be brought the day of the wedding to the Hall of State in an armored truck.

"The bridal gown took five and a half months to make," she says. "It had mink this thick," she adds, holding her thumb and index finger about four inches apart.

The women, minor celebrities in the world of Christian broadcasting, capture the strange fusion between this new, flamboyant gospel of prosperity and America's celebrity-driven culture. Not only are the wealthy

blessed by the Lord and encouraged to engage in a frenzy of outlandish consumption, but also those who are famous, those who have achieved any celebrity or notoriety, no matter how minor, or those who have power, are seen as ing important things to say about faith. Wealth, fame and power are manifestations of God's work, proof that God has a plan and

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design for believers. This new class of celebrity, plutocrat Christians fuses with the consumer society, one where the lives and opinions of entertainers, the rich and the powerful are news. The women tell me they are in Anaheim

the yearly conven-

tion is the only time they can see all the major Christian broadcasters in one place. But it is clear they also come to be seen.

"These are the people who set up the shows," Simmons says.

"This is a good way to see everybody. It is like the gathering of one big family. We have flown in to network."

This is the apotheosis of capitalism, the clivine sanction of the free market, of unhindered profit and the most rapacious cruelties of globalization. Corporations, rapidly turning America into an oligarchy, have little interest in Christian ethics, or anybody's ethics. They know what they have to do. as the titans of the dustry remind us, for their stockholders. They are content to increase profit at the expense of those who demand fair wages, health benefits, safe working conditions and pensions. This new oligarchic class is

creating a global marketplace where all workers, to compete, will have to become like workers in dictatorships such as China: denied rights, their wages dictated to them by the state, and forbidden from organizing or striking. America once attempted to pull workers abroad up to American levels. to foster the builcling of foreign labor unions, to challenge the abuse of workers in factories that flood the American market with cheap goods. But this new class seeks to reduce the American working class to the levels of this global serfdom. After all, anything that drains corporate coffers is a loss of freedom-the God-given American freedom to exploit other human beings to make money.

The marriage of this gospel of prosperity with raw, global capitalism, and the flaunting of the wealth and privilege brings,

supposedly blessed and championed by Jesus Christ. Compassion is relegated to private, inclividual acts of charity or left to churches. The callousness of the ideology, the notion that it in any way reflects the message of the gospels, which were preoceu-

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pied with the poor and the outcasts, illustrates how the new class has twisted Christian scripture to serve America's god of ism and discredited the Enlightenment values we once prized.

The Convention Center. located next door, is a huge, curvy glass structure with gleaming towers. The exhibition hall on the first floor has plush, blue carpeting and 320 display booths. At the far end of the hall lie the twisted remains of an Israeli bus blown up by Palestinian suicide bombers in Jerusalem. The Israeli Ministry of Tourism has the largest display space in the The

Christian Law Center, organized to remove "activist judges" in the courts, has people handing out yardsticks of gum. At a booth featuring Valerie Saxion's book

Gospel ofHealth, they are

ing raspberry shakes in blenders. A Virginia Web design company in another booth. offers "church Web sites the way God intended."

A bearded man dressed as a biblical prophet promotes tours to the Holy Land. Numerous antiabonion booths are staffed by women, who, it often turns out, had multiple abortions before finding Christ. There are fringe groups such as Jews for Jesus and Accuracy in Media,

is passing out a repon with the title

American

Cheer Attacks on *U.S. Media.*

Rows of palm trees are visible through banks of windows, and on the upper floors are

workshops, such as

God

in Hollywood," as well as luncheons. One

is entitled

ing Over Cities for Christ: The Thousand-Day-Plan." In the parking lot outside the center is a pickup truck with large hand-painted covered with antigay slogans. There is a round red cirde with a line through the center superimposed on the faces of two men kissing.

the Insanity" is painted

the top. I walk

outside after surveying the hall and pick up one of the pamphlets in a metal box on the side of the truck.

YOUR FAM-

ILY & FRIENDS FROM THE DANGERS OF ... HOMOSEXUALITY: THE TRUTH!" the pamphlet says. It lists "the facts about homosexuality they refuse to teach in Public Schools or repon on the Evening News!" including

of unsanitary sexual prac-

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tices, homosexuals carry the bulk of all bowel disease America"

and "homosexuals average 500 sexual partners in their short lifetime."

The opening session is held on the third floor, a large room with a round stage surrounded on three sides with rows of fold-ing chairs. The hall is dimly lit. There are a few thousand people.

Large television screens are suspended from the ceilings, and the platform in front of us has a podium and a grand piano. The host, Bob Lepine, cohost of the radio show *Family Life* broadcast

from Little Rock, Arkansas. is a round-faced man with an easy smile. He begins the session by showing himself in a video wandering the beaches near Anaheim asking surfers and stray Califor-nians, some of whom clearly spent the night sleeping on the beach, what

means. No one knows, but the guesses evoke

laughter from the hall.

of the fun things about coming here ... I was thinking about the old days, you know, when we used to go to Washington to the Sheraton in February,

and it's cold, and now we come here and it's warm, and you get to go to the beach and see weird peo-pie," he quips. He explains that the evening is sponsored by the Family Research Council and introduces its president, Tony Perkins, who, he notes, "was responsible for the covenant marriage law that got

in Louisiana," a law that made it harder

for couples to divorce.

Perkins is typical of the new class of insider-cum-outsiders.

He organized the rallies, broadcast around the nation to church audiences, known as "Justice Sunday," which featured an array of politicians such as Senate majority leader Bill Frist, all pounding home one central theme: the Democrats are at war with "people of faith." The Democrats used the filibuster, viewers were told, to block judicial appointees who were people of faith. Perkins works for James Dobson, who founded the Family Research Council, the lobbying arm of his Focus on the Family empire. Dobson has said the Supreme Court's legalization of abortion with *Roe v.*

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in white robes, the Ku Klux

Justice Sunday was part of a strategy devised more than two decades ago by Woody Jenkins. Perkins's political mentor. Jenkins and some 50 conservative men gathered in May 1981 at the northern VIrginia home of direct-mail pioneer Richard Viguerie to plot the growth of their movement following Ronald Reagan's presidential victory. They formed the Council for National Policy (CNP), a secretive, right-wing organization that brought together dominionists such as R. J. Rushdoony, Pat Robertson and Jerry Falwell with right-wing industrialists willing to fund them, such as Amway founder Richard DeVos Sr. and beer baron Joseph Coors. As DeVos quipped. the CNP "brings together the doers with the donors."

Jenkins, then a Louisiana state lawmaker, became the CNP's first executive director. He told a *Newsweek* reporter: day before the end of

century, the Council will be so influential that

no president, regardless of

or philosophy, will be able to ig-

nore us or our concerns or shut us out of the highest levels of government.'"

In 1999, Texas Governor George W. Bush addressed the group as he launched his bid for the presidency. The media were barred from the event. But those who wrote about the meeting afterward said that Bush, who refused to release a public transcript of his speech, promised to only appoint antiabortion judges if he was elected. The group, which meets three times a year in secret, brings together radical Christian activists, right-wing Republican politicians and wealthy patrons willing to fund the movement.

During Bush's presidency, Dick Cheney and Donald Rumsfeld have attended CNP meetings.

Perkins, like other leaders in the movement, has troubling associations with white supremacy groups. They work hard now to distance themselves from these relationships, often quoting Dr.

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Marrin Luther Kingjr. and drawing parallels between their movement and the

movement. But during the 1996 Senate

campaign of Woody jenkins, Perkins. who was jenkins's campaign manager. signed an $82,500 check to the head of the Ku Klux Klan, David Duke. to acquire Duke's phone bank list.6 And as late as 2001, Perkins spoke at a

fund-raiser for the Council of Conservative Citizens. a white nationalist group that has called blacks "a retrograde species of humanity" on its Web site.7

The ties by Christian Right leaders such as Perkins with racist groups highlight the long ties between right-wing fundamentalists and American racist organizations, including the Klan, which had a chaplain assigned to

During the

when many on the right and in corporate America were openly flirting with fascism, fundamentalist preachers such as Gerald B.

Wmrod and Gerald

Smith fused national and Christian sym-

bols to advocate the country's first crude form of Christo-fascism.

Smith, who openly admired the Nazis, founded a group called the Christian Nationalist Crusade, whose magazine was *The and*

the Flag. The movement proclaimed that "Christian character is the basis of all real Americanism."

By the late 1950s these radical Christians had drifted to the fiercely anticommunist john Birch Society. Many of the ideas championed by today's dominionists-the bizarre conspiracy theories, the calls for unrestrained capitalism, the war against "liberal" organizations such as the mainstream media and groups such as the ACLU, along with the calls to dismantle federal agencies that deal with housing or education-are drawn from the ideology of this rabid anticommunist enclave. Timothy LaHaye used to run john Birch Society training seminars in California. And Nelson Bunker Hunt, a member of the john Birch Society's national council, worked with LaHaye to help found the A baritone voice booms throughout the arena as we watch video images of the nation's capital: "America's culture was hijacked by a secular movement determined to redefine society,

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from religious freedom to the right to life. These radicals were doing their best to destroy two cenwries of traditional values, and no one seemed to be able to stop them until now."

"Will Congress undo 200 years of tradition?" the video asks ominously. "Not on our watch."

"This is about calling Christians across this nation to action,"

Perkins says in the video. "As one who spent nearly a decade in political office and even longer as a minister of the Gospel, I see

[the Family Research Council] as a bridge between Christians and between government. Spanning a gulf that has been created by judicial decisions that have taken away the rich soil of this nation, that is this historical soil of Christianity. and by those whose misguided theology have caused Christians to abandon the public square, leaving a cavernous void in public policy. As this bridge, the Family Research Council sends its team to Congress and into the White House on a daily basis, to advocate for family and for our faith,"

There was a brief attempt at resistance to the rule of National Religious Broadcasters by these dominionists. Wayne Pederson in 2002 was appointed to replace the group's longtime president.

Brandt Gustavson. "We get associated with the far Christian right and marginalized," Pederson told a reporter for the in

Minneapolis. "To me the important thing is to keep the focus on what's important to us

His effort to shift the organi-

zation's focus away from politics saw the executive committee chestrate his removal a few weeks later. He was replaced by Frank Wright, who had spent the previous eight years serving as the ecutive director of Kennedy's Center for Christian Statesmanship, a Capitol Hill ministry that conducts training for politicians on how to "think biblically about their role in government."

Wright, with white hair and a cold, hard demeanor. lacks the easy banter of Lepine or the comforting, bland good looks of Perkins. Wright lauds the transfonnation in Washington, saying that 130 members of the House of Representatives are "born

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again." He tells a story, which elicits laughter and applause, of how during a late-night private tour of the capital, he and other pastors stopped and prayed over Hillary Clinton's Senate floor desk.

Wright, like most speakers, begins by talking about his long marriage. It is a reminder that in Christ is stability, that the home and marriage are

that Christian men and

women achieve bliss denied to others. The movement, he says, is the bulwark against chaos, against a return to lives spinning out of control.

Gospel changed not just my life, it changed my marriage to Ruth," he says.

changed my family. The Gospel changes

families, and churches and communities and cities and nations.

All of what we call Western civilization today, it has the shape that it has and the character that it has because the Gospel changes things."

And then he warns his listeners about the enemies at the gate, saying that "calls for diversity and multiculturalism are nothing more than thinly veiled

on anyone who is wiUing or de·

sirous or compelled to proclaim Christian truth. Today, calls for tolerance are often a subterfuge, because they'll tolerate just about anything except Christian truth."

The broadcasters' association, he explains, is lobbying in Congress against

legislation, which, Wright explains to the

audience,

step one to defining what you do as against the law."

The broadcasters have worked to thwart the "fairness doctrine,"

what he calls

bane of Christian broadcasters.

bill was filed in the House of Representatives that would quire any programming that was 'controversial: quote unquote, in nature, to give equal time to opposing viewpoints," he tells the crowd. "Now let me think about this ... controversial things ...

the divinity of Christ, the virgin birth, the bodily Resurrection.

Everything we teach is controversial to someone else. If we had to give equal time to every opposing viewpoint, there would be no time to proclaim the truth that we've been commanded to

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claim. So we will fight the 'fairness doctrine' tooth and nail. It could be the end of Christian broadcasting if we don't,"

The preoccupation with legislation, the plethora of speakers who come from Christian lobbying groups based in the capital, attest to a movement that is increasingly as preoccupied with legislation as with saving souls. And those that do not deal with the nuts and bolts of legislation remind those present that there are forces out there that seek to destroy Christians. James

MacDonald, an imposing man with a shaved head, runs a church in Arlington Heights, Illinois, and is heard regularly on 600 Christian radio oudets. He fires up the crowd.

"How many of you out there think ministering the Word is unpopular?" he asks. as a sea of hands shoots into the air.

"His eyes are like a flame of fire." MacDonald says, quoting Revelation 19. "Out of his mouth goes a sharp sword, and with it he can strike the nations. He treads the wine press of the ness and wrath of the almighty God, and on his robe and on his thigh a name is written: King of Kings and Lord of Lords. Jesus commands all men everywhere to come to the knowledge of Him."

He reminds us that "ages of faith are not marked by dialogue but by proclamation" and "there is power in the unapologetic proclamation of truth. There is power in it. This is a kingdom of power." When he says the word "power," he draws it out for emphasis. He tells the crowd to eschew the "persuasive words of human wisdom."

he says, does "not rest in the wisdom of

men but the power of God." And, in a lisping imitation of liberals, he mocks, amid laughter and applause, those who want to

"share" and be sensitive to the needs of others.

His antics delight most of the crowd, but not all. Luis Palau. a close

of Billy Graham, is one of the few present at the convention who is uncomfortable with the naked and repeated calls for power. Palau is an affable man, an Argentine with a refreshing worldliness about him. He also represents a traditional

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evangelicalism that has been shunted aside, often ruthlessly, by this new class. His

is on personal salvation, he says, not the

seizing of political power. He refused to become involved in the referendum banning gay marriage in Oregon, where his organization is based, although he, like Graham, is no supporter of gay rights. But he bristles at the coarseness, the naked calls for a Christian state, and the anti-intellectualism. He, like Graham, shuns the movement's caustic, biting humor that belittles homosexuals, those deemed effete intellectuals and those condemned as

humanists." The emphasis on abortion and gay marriage to the exclusion of other issues worries him.

"There are some Christians who have gone overboard," Palau says, choosing his words carefully as we

"The message has

become a little distorted in states where they talk about change yet focus on only one issue. We need a fuller transformation. The great thing Billy Graham did was to bring intellectualism back to fundamentalism.

don't think it is wrong to want to see political change, especially in places like Latin America," he says. "Something has to happen in politics. But it has to be based on convictions. We have to overcome the sense of despair. I worked in Latin America in the days when almost every country had a dictator. I dreamed, especially as a kid, of change, of freedom and justice. But I believe that change comes from personal conviction, from leading a more biblical lifestyle, not by Christianizing a nation. If we called to Christ, we will build an

nation through personal

ethics. When you lead a life of purity, when you respect your wife and are good to your family, when you don't waste money gam-bling and

you begin to work for better schools, for

more protection and safety for your community. All change, torically, comes from the bottom up. And this means the masses from within."

Palau sees his work as focused on the conversion of souls.

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institutional change." But this, he adds, "can take twO or three generations."

The emphasis on personal renewal and commitment to Christ-the staple message of evangelists such as Billy Graham and Luis Palau-is an

to the new class. While speakers

mand that followers give their lives to Christ, and while the bom-again experience is considered the dividing line between believers and nonbelievers, the conversion experience is no longer the dominant theme pounded home from the pulpit or across the airwaves.

It has been replaced by the rhetoric of war, the demands of a warrior God who promises blood and vengeance, and by the rhetoric of persecution, by the belief that there are sinister forces that seek the destruction of

It

by a conspicuous

and unapologetic infatuation with wealth, power and fame. As the movement has shifted away from the focus on personal salvation to a focus on power,

has incorporated into its theology the values, or lack of them, of a flagrant consumer society.

The strangest alliance, on the surface, is with IsraeliJews. After the movement generally teaches that Jews who do not convert are damned and will be destroyed in the fiery, apocalyptic ending of the world. It is early on Sunday morning in a ballroom on the second floor of the Hilton Hotel. The Israel Ministry ofTourism is hosting a breakfast. Several hundred people are seated at round tables with baskets of bread, fruit plates and silver pitchers of coffee.

Waiters are serving plates of scrambled eggs and creamed spinach.

Nearly everyone is white. On the platform is a huge picture of the Dome of the Rock, the spot where the Temple will be rebuilt to herald the Second Coming. Some 700,000 Christian tourists visit Israel each year, and with the

decline in overall tourism, they

have become a valued source of revenue in IsraeL

Dominionists preach that Israel must rule the biblical land in order for Christ to return. The belief that Jews who do not convert will be killed is unmentioned at the breakfast. The featured speakers include Avraham Hirschsohn, the new Israeli minister of

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tourism; and Michael Medved, a cultural conservative and a nationally syndicated radio talk-show host. Medved is one of the most prominent Jewish defenders of Mel Gibson's *The Passion of* and of the radical Christian Right. He wears a yarmulke and is warmly greeted by the crowd.

more Christian America is good for the Jews," he says.

"This is obvious. Take a look at this support for Israel. A more Christian America is good for America, something Jewish people need to be more cognizant about and acknowledge. A more ish community is good for the Christians, not just because of the existence of allies, but because a more Jewish community is less seduced by secularism."

A former left-wing radical, who in later life embraced dox]udaism, he lambastes other Jews for their hostility to Christianity.

"When you see Jews who are part of the attack on Christmas,"

he says, "you know they have rejected their own faith."

He

off causes in which both Jewish and Christian people have been active, including the call for prayer in schools and the fight against abortion (although abortion is legal in Israel). He fends his Jewish integrity by saying he does not believe in the Rapture. But this is more than a religious alliance. It is a political alliance. It unites messianic Christians with right-wing messianic Jews, who believe God has anointed them to expand their dominion throughout the Middle East at the expense of the Arab majority.

This is soon made clear by the next speaker, Glenn Plummer, a black minister from Detroit who is active in the Republican It is his role-I suspect because his status as an inner-city black minister

expression of such sentiments "all right"-

to unleash the audience's vituperative hate against Muslims. He says he knows about Muslims because "I come from Detroit, where the biggest mosque in America is. It didn't take 9/1 I to show me there is a global battle going on for the souls of men.... When Islam comes into a place it is intent on taking

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over everything, not only government, but the business, the neighborhoods, everything."

The Christian writer Kay Arthur, who can barely

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tears when speaking of the Jews and Israel, assures those in the room that, although she loves

if she had to choose be·

tween America and Israel,

would stand with Israel, stand with

Israel as a daughter of the King of Kings, stand according to the word of God." She goes on to quote at length from the Book of Revelation, repeating many of the familiar passages that inspire the movement, and speaks of Jesus seated in a throne floating about Jerusalem as believers

raptured up toward him in the

sky. The fate of unreconstructed Jews. including-one would assume-those hosting the breakfast, is omitted.

A popular radio host, Janet Parshall, who also leads tours to the Holy Land, speaks to the group of her dialogue with the Lord about taking tourists to a place where there are suicide bombings and attacks.

the Holy Land has terrorists: I said. But God said, 'janet, you're from Washington DC:" a quote that elicited laughter, Hirschsohn. Israel's minister oftourism, says to the gathering:

"You stood with us for the last four years when nobody else would. Thank you."

"The Bible tells us the Lord spoke to Abraham in the land where today American troops are defending freedom," he says.

He announces that the Israeli tourism ministry will build a grim center" for Christian tourists in the Galilee.

The charred remains of Israeli Public Bus 19 are in the boring convention hall. The bus, owned by a Christian Zionist group called the jerusalem Connection, was blown up by Palestinian suicide bombers in january 2004.

The president of the urion, retired U.s. Brigadier General james Hutchens, according to information from the group, "looks at the conflict in Israel within a biblical context." Bus 19 has, since the group acquired it, been displayed around the world, including in The Hague and in

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numerous "Remember Israel" rallies in the United States. On a table next to the bus. a seated Jerusalem Connection official hands out pamphlets reading, "Bring Bus #19 To Your Community!"

One of the reasons to bring the bus. the pamphlet says. is that Christians. you will increase in stature. appreciation and acceptance by Jews."

An Egyptian woman, a Christian who is manning a booth near the bus that advertises Christian broadcasts to the Arab world. is periodically reduced to tears by

conventioneers who.

visiting the bus. tell her Arabs are "terrorists."

Onlookers climb onto a platform alongside the bus to peer within. Its sides are scorched black. center doors twisted. steel frame bent and shattered. Bus 19 has been adorned. with banners bearing biblical quotations, including:

will plant Israel in their

own land. never again to be uprooted from the land I have given them" (Amos 9:15); "And I will bless those who bless you. And whoever curses you I will curse" (Genesis 12:3). and "Those who say come, let us destroy them as a nation. that the name of Israel be remembered no more.... They form an alliance against God"

(Psalm

There are

of condolences from American schoolchildren.

flowers on the flooring of the bus, and at the base of the *raised* platform large photos and biographies of those killed in the attack. A poster reads:

Palestinians love their children. more

than they hate Israel. then there will be peace in Palestine:' The poster shows six photos of children holding weapons or strapped with explosives.

"Over 50 public transportation buses just like this one have been bombed in Israel," reads another sign. "In three and a half years. suicide bombers have killed more than 975 people in Israel.

They are represented here:'

But some of the Israelis in the hall are uncomfortable with the Bus 19 display. They are telling conventioneers. whom they are to get to visit Israel. that the bus represents an old phase in

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the conflict, and that Israel is now moving toward peace. One Israeli is

who has long, blond hair. a brown shirt, and

high leather boots. She immigrated to Israel from Holland and lives on a cooperative mango farm near the Sea of Galilee. She says she is "embarrassed" to be at the convention. "These people are anti-Semitic." she says, speaking softly as conventioneers move past the large Israeli display space. She is unhappy with the bigotry toward Muslims expressed by the speakers. When asked why the ministry is here, she answers curtly: "money."

"No one else visits [srae)," she says.

In this version of the Christian Gospel, the exploitation and abuse of other human beings is a good. Homosexuality is an evil.

And this global, heartless system of economic rationalism has morphed in the rhetoric of the Christian Right into a test of faith.

The ideology it espouses is a radical evil, an ideology of death. It calls for wanton destruction, destruction of human beings, of the environment, of communities and neighborhoods, oflabar unions, of a free press, of Iraqis, Palestinians or others in the Middle East who would deny us oil fields and hegemony, of federal regulatory agencies, social welfare programs, public education-in shon, the destruction of all people and programs that stand in the way of a Christian America and its God-given right to dominate the rest

of the planet. The movement offers, in return, the absurd but tive promise that those who are right with God will rise to become spiritual and material oligarchs. They will become the new class.

Those who are not right with God, be they poor or Muslim or saved, deserve what they get. In the rational world none of this makes sense. But believers have been removed from a world. They believe that through Jesus all is possible. It has become a Christian duty to embrace the exploitation of others, to build a Christian America where freedom means the freedom of the powerful to dominate the weak. Since believers see themselves as becoming empowered through faith, the gross injustices and pression that could well boomerang back on most of them are of

emotion-filled

spectacles

pas-

Grace.

utopia.

little concern. They assuage their consciences with the small acts of charity they or their churches dole out to the homeless or the mission fields. The

religious

and spiritual

bromides compensate for the emptiness of their lives. They are en-ergized by hate campaigns against gays or Muslims or liberals or immigrants. They walk willingly into a totalitarian prison they are helping to construct. They yearn for it. They work for it with sion, self-sacrifice and a blinding self-

righteousness. "Evil when we are in its power is Dot felt as evil but as a necessity, or even a duty," Simone Wei! wrote in *Gravity and*

And it is the duty of

the Christian foot soldiers to bring about the Christian When it is finished, when all have been stripped ortega! and social protection, it will be too late to resist. This is the genius of totalitarian movements. They convince the masses to agitate for their own incarceration.

peculiar

—*Elias*

Canetti,

P

in-

civil-rights

CHAPTER EIGHT

The Crusade

One of the most striking traits of the inner life of a crowd is the feeling of being persecuted, a

angry sensitiveness and

irritability directed against those it has once and forever nominated as enemies. These can behave in any manner, harsh or conciliatory, cold or sympathetic, severe or mild-whatever they do will be interpreted as

springing from an unshakable malevo-lence, a premeditated intention to destroy the crowd, openly or by stealth.

Crowds and Powerl

astor RussellJohnson stands against the backdrop of a huge American flag with the Christian cross superimposed on the Stars and Stripes. He calls his Christian warriors to battle. He vokes the legacy of the

movement, speaking of Dr.

Martin Luther King Jr. and Rosa Parks. He talks of embattled Christians in America. A war ofvalues and morals, of decency and goodness pitted against forces of darkness and evil, has enveloped the country, and he issues a strident call to arms. He calls Ohio

"the tip of the spear to turn back the nation.

"We're on the beaches of Normandy, and we can see the pill-box entrenchments of academic and media liberalism, *n* he says.

"We'll take back our country for Christ. *n* Johnson, who leads the Ohio Restoration Project, is on a 10-eity tour in Ohio. The Christian group's credo is "Pray, Serve, gage. *n* The rallies across the state are thinly disguised campaign events for "Christian" candidates, such as Ohio Secretary of State J. Kenneth Blackwell, the Republican nominee for governor. But the speakers also pound home the message that Christians must

The

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protect the family, ban abortion, bring back school prayer and register voters who will create a Christian Ohio. There are voter registration cards available, and the few hundred people at the rally are urged to join the "Patriot Pastors"-some 2,000 Ohio pastors, each of whom has promised to

recruit 100 new "Inter-cessors" or "Faithful Servants of Prayer" and 200 "Minutemen Volunteers" to work in the upcoming election. The goal of the movement is to register 300,000 new voters. Johnson has called for a monthly voteHegistration Sunday where clergy will show a PowerPoint presentation on how to register, collect cards and send them directly to the office of the secretary of state. These new voters will, in a phrase repeated often at the rally, be like

"salt and light for America." They will stem the forces out to destroy them and the nation. They will return America to the Christian path-which, Johnson claims, was the intent and goal of the nation's founders.

The fusion of Christian and national symbols marks a completion for those at the rally of America's new state religion, a Christo-fascism. A choir sings rousing patriotic and Christian hymns while pictures of American troops fighting in Iraq flash on huge screens. There are moments of prayer and a somber honoring of the men and women in uniform, with all veterans in the room asked to stand. Looming above it all is a huge American flag with the Christian cross superimposed on it. On another wall is a flag with a superimposed George Washington, sword by his side, kneeling in prayer. Christian rallies like these are also being held in other states such as Texas and Pennsylvania.

Johnson warns about the "secular jihadists" who have "hijacked" America, removing public prayer from schools, the 10

Commandments and the Bible from public places. He accuses the public schools, which he says promote an ideology of secular humanism, of neglecting to teach that Hider was "an avid evolutionist." There can be no negotiation, no compromise, no deals cut with the enemy. And the enemy lives in your neighborhood, teaches in

your schools and works in your office. The battle lines are being marcated in the suburbs of Dayton and across America.

Johnson likens America's predicament (0 that of

Germany.

He tells the gathering ofabout 400 supponers that church congregations in Gennany would sing so that they could not hear the passing of trainloads of

Jews headed for

concentration camps.

He accuses Christians in America of leading "Neville lives." referring to the British prime minister who naively signed a neutrality pact with Adolf Hitler. As Johnson speaks, pictures of Hitler and Chamberlain flash on the screens. If Christians do not begin to

they will be next. They will be hauled off in freight cars like the Jews in Nazi Gennany and murdered.

The rhetoric creates an atmosphere of being under siege. It impans the warm glow of comradeship. the feeling that although outside these walls there is a dangerous, hostile world, here we are all brothers and sisters. It is clear to whom Christians a moral obligation: to fellow Christians. The world is divided into friends and enemies, neighbors and strangers. A moral obligation, Freud wrote, only increases with our affection for an individual. In this room, the commandment to "Love your neighbor as yourself" is twisted, in ways Freud could understand, to "Love your fellow Christians as yourself." Loving one's neighbor presupposes a bond, a shared sense of belonging, but it was a presuppo-sition Freud pointed out was absurd.

"If this grandiose

commandment had run 'love thy neighbor as thy neighbor loves thee,' I should not take exception to it," he wrote.2 Loving a stranger, Freud said, was counter to human nature: "If he is a stranger to me ... it will be hard for me to love And those

outside the Christian community are effectively made strangers.

They are no longer worthy of being loved. The distinction creates a world where there are only two types of people. There are godly men and women who advance Christian values, and there are nonbelievers-many of them liberal Christians-who peddIe the filth and evil of secular humanism. This dividing line is nothing

The Crusade

other than the distinction between human and nonhuman. between the worthy and those unworthy of life, between saved and unsaved, between friend and foe.

rn rallies like those in Johnson's Ohio tour, friends, neighbors.

colleagues and

members who do not conform to the ideol-

ogy are gradually dehumanized. They are tainted with the spised characteristics inherent in the godless. This attack is waged in highly abstract terms, to negate the reality of concrete, specific and unique human characteristics, to deny the possibility of goodness in those who do not conform. Some human beings, the message goes, are no longer human beings. They are types.

This new, exclusive community fosters rigidity, conformity and intolerance. In this new binary world segments of the human race are disqualified from moral and ethical consideration. And be·

cause fundamentalist followers live

a binary universe, they are

incapable of seeing others as anything more than inverted dons of themselves. If they seek to destroy nonbelievers to create a Christian America, then nonbelievers must be seeking to stroy them. This belief system negates the possibility of the ethi·

cal life. It fails to grasp that goodness must be sought outside the self and that the best defense against

is to seek it within.

When people come to believe that they are immune from evil.

that there is no resemblance between themselves and those they define as the enemy. they will inevitably grow to embody the evil they claim to fight. It is only by grasping our own capacity for evil, our own darkness, that we hold our own capacity for evil at bay.

When evil is always external, then moral purification always en-tails the eradication of others.

This rhetoric of depersonalization creates a frightening moral fragmentation, an ability to act with compassion and justice to·

ward those within the dosed, Christian circle yet allow others out·

side the circle to be abused, silenced and stripped of their rights.

And the passivity of many in America who do not acknowledge the danger of this rhetoric. and the moral fragmentation it inspires.

lends itself to the pleasant fiction that these radicals are fundamentally decent, that they do not mean what they say, that they will never actually persecute homosexuals or nonbelievers or execute abortion providers. Such passivity only accelerates the bility of evil. Extremists never

extremists. They become

extremists gradually. They move gingerly forward in an open society. They advance only so far as they fail to meet resistance. And no society is immune from this moral catastrophe.

The Christian Right, for now, is forced to function within the political system it seeks to

Judges continue to judge. Teach-

ers continue to teach. The media continue to report. Politicians continue to campaign. But in the world of fundamentalist rhetoric, only "Bible-believing" judges are worthy of respect. Only Christian teachers are trUe educators. And only the pseudo-reporters seen and

on Christian broadcasts, who portray the course of historical and world events as confonning to purported biblical prophecies, report the real news. Finally, it is only the men of God, those who champion the Christian state, who have the right to rule. The movement is creating a parallel system, complete with parallel Christian organizations, to replace the old one. It is a slow and often imperceptible process, but Johnson's Ohio rally is the outward expression of vast subterranean shifts that are methodi-cally reorienting the lives of literalist Christians and the country.

Students in Christian schools are being inculcated with the intolerant, heavy-handed political doctrine on display at the rally.

The Accelerated Christian Education curriculum, one of the country's three major publishers of Christian textbooks, defines in its schoolbooks as "referring to philosophy not supported by Scripture" and "conservative" as "dedicated to the preserving of Scriptural principles." And "Conservative Christian schools," identified by their affiliation with one of four national

school organizations that define themselves as evangelical and are the fastest-growing segment within the private school system. Such schools now represent 15.4 percent of all pri-

vate school enrollment. The National Center for Education Statistics shows a 41 percent growth in the total enrollment at conservative Christian schools between 1992 and

The National

Center for Education Statistics estimates that the number of home schoolers rose from 850,000 to 1.1 million between 1999

and 2003. Of those surveyed, 72 percent of parents cited the desire to give religious and moral instruction as a top reason for home-schooling.·

In texts published by A Beka, one of the big fundamentalist publishing houses, African religious beliefs are described as

"false."1 Hinduism is "pagan"6 and "eviL"' The lack of Christian conversion among Africans is blamed on "Satan's strong hold on these people," according to a Bob Jones University Press history textbook for seventh graders.10 A Beka's high school world history textbook blames the poverty and political chaos in most of Africa on a lack of faith. It skips over the repressive colonial European regimes that exploited the continent and decimated the population in countries such as the Congo, explaining:

For

a thousand years, there was no dear *Christian witness in vast*

of Africa;

idolatry,

with animism (the

that natural

and

are

by mostly

spirits) prevented

most

from

how

for

thus develop high

that ofother

Empires. 11

Another A Beka textbook argues that "witchcraft and spirit worship" caused most postcolonial self-governments in Africa to descend into dictatorships.12 Hinduism is described as "devastating to India's history." Hindus are "incapable ofwriting history [because] all that happens is dissipated in their minds into confused dreams. What we call historical truth and veracity-intelligent comprehension of events, and fidelity in representing them-nothing of this sort can be looked for among the Hindus." 14

The Muslim prophet Muhammad is portrayed as deceiving followers about his

encounters with angels." and Buddha

is criticized because he desired to "leave his wife and newborn in a search for enlightenment. The deaths of Muhammad and

set against the risen Christ, are taken as proof that Islam and Buddhism

false religions. And while the movement

works alongside right-wing Catholic groups, within its own circle it spits venom at the Catholic faith. The A Beka textbook calls Catholicism "distorted" and explains that in Catholic countries such as Ireland children "grow up believing the traditions of the Roman Catholic Church without knowing of God's free tion."16 The Catholic empires of France and Spain failed to nize the United States, students are told, because God wanted to make America a Christian nation.

The college protesters of the 1960s were largely the instruments of communists "seeking to exploit youthful rebellion in order to advance their own goals." 17 Riots occurred in black neighborhoods

"power-hungry individuals stirred up the

people." II Those dependent on the welfare programs of the 1960s

"became more susceptible to politicians that preyed on economic insecurity.... In this way politicians literally bought the votes of millions of Americans."

And Joseph McCarthy becomes a pa-

triot, with a textbook

"McCarthy's conclusions,

technically

were drawn from the

of undisputed

It is this binary worldview that informs those around me at the rally. The room falls silent to watch a video that will cede the

by Blackwell. It begins with images of the life of Christ. The text that accompanies the images is lifted from a sage in LaHaye's final apocalyptic novel *Glorious Appearing.* The novel reprints a sermon by the late Dr. Shadrach Meshach lock-ridge, who served as the pastor of the Calvary Baptist Church in San Diego from 1952 to 1993. It is pounded out in a raplike beat, the voice deep and sonorous. The narrator slowly builds momen-

tum, and the crowd shouts, rises and erupts in thunderous applause. Blackwell regularly uses the video as a campaign prop.

my

a

king. He's

of

Jews; that's a racial king. He's

king of/srael; that's a

king. He's the king of righteousness. He's

of

ages.

He's

king of

He's the king of

He's

king of

kings.

being a

He's

Lord of

That's my king. Well, I

do you know

The video builds on this refrain. all the while listing attributes of the

The beat and pace of the words infect the crowd, which shouts.

He's

He's

He's ir-

Well, you can't get Him out ofyour mind. You can't get Him off of your hand. You can't outlive Him and you can't live without Him. The

couldn't

Him, but they

they

stop Him. Pilate

find any fault

Herod couldn't

Him. Death couldn't handle Him, and

grave

hold

That's my

It is on this euphoric note that gubernatorial candidate Blackwell rises to speak. He turns to the cheering crowd, now on their feet.

and shouts: "He is my King! Do you know Him?"

Blackwell is the only candidate for governor to appear at the rallies. He has posted on his Web site a list of 20 requirements for people of "high character." He helped make Ohio a "State of Char-aeter," part of a movement within the Christian Right that includes the states of Alabama. Arkansas, Delaware, Georgia and Oklahoma. There are also more than 160 American cities and towns of "high character," 36 counties and 47 foreign cities, most of them in the Philippines. Blackwell has put funding and resources aside to

and Leaders on how to be people of

To all potential candidates he sends out forms to fill out to declare they are persons of character and posts the names of those who abide by the request on his Web site.

Woven into Blackwell's 20-point list. which deftly eschews all religious terminology, is a blueprint for an authoritarian state, one where questioning power is unpatriotic and only those with "high character," as rigidly defined by Christians like Blackwell, have the right to lead and be heard. Individualism, the right to privacy.

the belief that other political viewpoints and moral systems have value-all are attacked as disruptive to social cohesion.

Within the movement there is an open call for a uniform moral code, one that needs to be enforced in the public and vate realms. In the section tided "Unity," followers are told: *people*

to build relationships that foster one-

with them to a common prom-

ise,

mission or *purpose. Ethical*

seek

uniformity in *their people's shared character ethics unity*

otherwise richly

people. Without a persevering

to shared

ethics, there is no *hope for sus-*

unity. (Observable Virtues:

In section 7, tided

followers are told how to en-

force this unity:

people

the

ofothers. They

that

compels us

toward

Our

for

results in

from one another. Isolation

to

people resist this

by

and

invite

They place

in *relationships that motivate self-examination and courage*

from others,

those

(Observable

an

disclosing

The

157

Point 14. titled "Honoring Authority." is a reminder that without moral guides. people of "high character" can go astray and deviate from the ethical standards imposed from above:

All

art

requiring

for behavior. High-

people willingly

to the authority of those who are

with upholding those

They help

and

then abide by *the*

laws. rules

established

by

authorities and strive to live within those

for the

of all

When those

authority

late

ethics. high-character people

wise

to

hold

(Observable

Virtues: yieldedness,

with the mission.

Toward the end of the list, in point 19, under a heading titled

"Our Ability to Change." there is a section tided "Submission to *Truth transforms*

only when we submit to

who

seek truth cannot not *transform. Eventually confronts*

the power of truth. When

of

are

what is

they feel convicted to replace or *"put off" their lower pursuing*

"putting on"

ethics. Tak-

ing action on *this*

overnight or *over a long*

often painful

All the points ask people of "high character" to give over all authority for moral and political

to leaders who tell them

what is true and what is right. All must, if they have "high character," invite scrutiny by these leaders, by the organs of the state and by their neighbors. These tenets are the pillars of the police state. the state where all are told to watch for social and political deviants. where there is only one orthodox truth, where all dissent is heresy, where those who are not of "high character," those

fail-

Traditional

come-as-you-are

electric

service

spirit.[27]

who do not submit and do what they are told. are not allowed to contaminate the public domain. Those of "high character," those who abide by these moral tenets, become servile, afraid. bound to the tasks laid out by their leaders. willing to be punished for ing to achieve the moral standards and goals imposed by the state and ready to denounce those around them.

Rod Parsley, the head of the World Harvest Church, is one of the Christian Right's shining lights. not least because of his crossover appeal among African Americans. who make up about 45 percent of his 12,OOo-member congregation. Parsley works crowds like a revival preacher. His spitfire phrases tumble out of his mouth. His face is swiftly covered with sweat, which he periodically swipes clean with a white handkerchief. Often, as he did at a rally at Columbus with former Attorney General John Ashcroft, Parsley orders the secular media to leave. He was instrumental in mobilizing voters to support the gay marriage ban during the 2004 presidential elections in Ohio, an effective tool in getting the religious right to the polls to vote for President Bush.

Parsley represents the new breed of Christian Right leaders.

His worship services resemble freewheeling chats between him and the congregation.

hymnals and choreographed,

predictable liturgies, as well as suits and dresses, have been replaced by a casual

attitude,

guitars and

dancing in the aisles. But the

revolves around Parsley. He

exudes the aura of a rock star and the moral authority of a prophet.

Parsley, although white, changes easily into the traditional rhythms and cadences of the black church. He questions the biological basis for homosexuality. He argues that the gay lifestyle is morally and physically damaging to homosexuals. He says that liberals defend homosexuality to erode the moral fiber of the nation.

Islam, he says, is "an anti-Christ religion" that intends to use violence to conquer the world. Allah, Parsley contends, is a demon And Christian America has been mandated by God to do battle and defeat all demons to usher in the reign of Christ.

Crusade

speak

and

been

revolutionary

movement.

Such

crusades

have

championed

by

soldiers

citizens

who

denied

or

their

pursuit

take

itself.

been

escalation

social

Communism

from

Marxism

Nazism,

from

mayhem

martyrdom,

from

anarchy

democracy.

revolution

is

dependent

upon

becomes

necessary

vice

or

and

intelligence,

people

demand

become

and

hold

the

right,

condemns

social

rain

no

no

They

long

avoid

con-

call

devil's

demilitarized

inside

the

their

sanctuary

order

their

little

façade

peace

there

those

little

darker

mine

understand

terminology:

power—real

power—con-

nothing

without

demand.

Somebody's

to

speak

and

seen

Somebody's

to

"I'm

back

the

time

line;

[Applause]

know

noticed

but

crisis.

chaos.

moral

foundations

once

quickly

crumbling

no

The

Charismatic and funny, he peppers the language of war and violence intO his sermons, which usually rouse his audiences to their feet. 1 heard him

in Washington, where, in a naked call to

battle, he soon had those in the hall standing and shouting. (Part of his peroration appears above, in Chapter 1.)

Throughout history, countries

kingdoms have

birthed on

the battlefield of a

been

and

have refused to be

delayed or detoured in

to

up a cause

they believed deserving ofeven death

Now, the effect ofsuch

an upheaval has

the

of every religious, political,

and

event from

to feminism,

to

to

to

A moral

the moral virtue of the

people. It

when the

and ignorance,

virtue

ofa

it. At that point, negotiation

and compromise

void

revolution is inevitable. ...

The church that claims to

cause of

yet

confrontation, is little more than a

club. They want

with

thunder, and rain with

lightning.

to

frontation by *dwelling in what I*

the

zone,

safety of

. ... in

that they *might*

preserve

of

at any price. But

are

in this room with pigmentation in their skin a than

that

this

cedes

got

up

be

and be heard.

got

say,

not going to the

of

bus, not one single solitary

more. My father owns

the bus

I will sit where 1 *please."*

. ...

1don't

ifyou've

it *or not,*

we are at a point

of

Our culture is in

The

con-

structed by *the tenets ofour faith are around* us

with

sign of a cure. We are at a point of crisis. We are at a

point.

morning

faced

Let

when

complacency

desire

mine

change,

consequence

sion

chaos.

contentment

pacify

the

cry

"Freedom

can

becomes

confrontation,

Such

was

church.

women

became

martyrs

They

in.

mocked

and

ridiculed

social,

political,

and

religious

leaders

their

bow,

and

they

see

embers

flicker

see

out

indistinction.

see

remnant

people

morning

are

cause

than

There's

greater

few

remnant

lievers

scorned

succession

miraculously

from

understand

where

came

from.

multiplied

miraculously.

more

they

the

more

prosper

I'm

here

tell

you,

you

something.

begun

reach

critical

are

the

special-interest

group

order

the

with

the

hope.

rescuing

downtrodden,

disheartened,

in

the

humanity.

Look

us.

people

battered,

but

bowing.

Because

propelled—here's

power

that

Christians,

evangelical

are

the

original

obsessive-

down

one

arm

and

the

up.

and

victory.

power

than

160

AMERICAN FASCISTS

strategic inflection

And we are this

with a

choice.

me share it with you this way:

ex·

ceeds your

and

for

the

is conces-

and

But when comfort and

no *longer*

people, the

at any cost"

be heard, and

it *alone*

the catalyst which produces

which

gives birth to change.

upheaval

apparent in *the early*

Men and

and misfits.

didn't fit

They were

by the

of

day. But ... they could not

would not burn.

I don't know if you've noticed it or *not, but I the*

starting to

again. I

a glorious church just about to rise

ofthe blurs *of*

I

a

of

here this

that

glad to give their lives to a

greater

themselves.

no

drama than the sight of a

be·

gathered for breakfast,

by a

of adver-

saries, multiplying

a world that still doesn't

it

We've

The

afflict us,

we

and grow.

to

if

think 2004 was

we have not

to

mass. We

largest

in America.

We're giving

to chaos. We're fighting

sword

Word. We're fighting savagery with

We're

the

restoring the

reviving the life of

Christ

hearts of

at them. Look at

We're

and we're

we are not

Why?

we are

what they don't get-we're propelled by

a

is greater than ourselves.

Christians,

compulsive people. We put

other goes

We cover our mouths,

the gaze ofour eyes shouts a hallelujah

of

We're compelled by a

greater

ourselves,

Crusade

compelled

serve

leader,

upon

absolute

truth.

when

about

secular

the

church

Jesus

across

America.

has

us

secular

use

the

make

God

give

time

singing

"I

Surrender

All":

"All

Jesus

trust

daily

surrender

will

and

thousand

shall

me,

and

women

such

the

opposition.

us

somebody

like

in

Valley

Elah,

crying

"Is

there

cause?"

somebody

like

have

perfect

to

Pharaoh,

saying,

somebody

Martin

"God

day

black

men

Jews

Catholics,

the

thank

last.'"

need

give

Patrick

the

The

161

to

an infallible

an irresistible power which

is *based*

Listen,

you get hold of truth-I'm not talking

tol-

erance, that's what

humanism has done to

of

Christ

It

turned

into

human-

ists, where we try to

Bible as a tool to

us

what we want. It's

to *start*

old songs again, like

to

1 *surrender./All to him* 1 *freely*

give./l will ever love and

him.!In his presence

live. I

all. Though none go with me, still I

follow." A

thousand men may fall at my left

ten

at my right,

but it

not come nigh thee. With God *before*

who can be

against?

Men

of

moral stock will not cave in *at*

sight of first

You don't need anybody. Just give us

somebody. Give

David

the

of

with

five smooth stones,

out,

another

Give us

Moses. They don't

to *have*

speech. Give

us a Moses

stand in front *of*

"L-l-l-l-l-let my-

better let 'entgo."

Give us somebody. Give us somebody like Martin-what poor whites called Dr. *King. Give us*

like

to *stand*

over Washington Mall again, and say,

hasten that

when

all God's children,

and white men,

and gentiles,

Protestants and

may join *hands and sing in*

words

of that old *Negro spiritual, 'Free at last, free at last, God*

Almighty, we're free at

We don't

everybody. Just

us a

Henry, who at

birth of the American Revolution

out, "Is life so dear and

peace so sweet that it *is to*

purchased at the price of

chains

and slavery?

it, Almighty

know not what

oth-

ers

but as for

me

or give

Now, this revolution is not for the

This revolu-

what it

not for the

the weak, but for

AMERICAN FASCISTS

brave

who step over

line out of

comfort

zone and truly

to

disciples of Christ. I'm *talking*

about

who

have to *be right.*

recognized,

or

Something

hap-

logos and egos are

[Applause.] I'm

talking about people

to be right,

re-

or regarded . ..

need a position

the front table.

They're just happy to be in *the battle.*

So my

to you this morning is this.

the

alarm. A

is

never likes it *when I*

this. so let me say it

Man

bat-

tle stations! Ready your weapons!

say

is

in-

citing. I *came to*

a riot. I

to effect a divine disturbance

in the heart and soul of the church.

Man your battle stations. Ready your

Lock and

load-for the thirty-forty liberal

filed against OUT

Internal

One of

com-

plaints was that

wouldn't

names to the media be-

cause they "feared retribution." I

them, "What do *they*

One of the newspapermen

"Well,

you're going to *call out*

I

"I *already*

in

every night for them

they filed." I

think

that's the

he was

Spiritual

is taking

if

"Yes."

Let the struggle begin. Let it *begin* in *your heart today with a shout unto Him who has called*

to *war-not only that, He has*

you and I *to win.* I

be silent no

demand it,

history compels

our

requires it, but most

God is still watching.

Parsley swings deftly from anger and bellicosity to sentimentality.

He is arrogant and self-righteous and then maudlin and ingratiat-ing. He shapes and fashions the moods and emotions of those who stand before

him. And

like many of these preachers, is

The

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rich. He collects his millions of dollars by promoting the gospel of prosperity, the promise that if his followers, mostly of modest means, tithe 10 percent of their salaries, God will reward them a hundredfold. This money is in addition to the collections he often solicits two or three times during a service. He has, in the past, urged followers to bum their household bills and give the money to him to be free from debt.26

just love to talk about money," Parsley once said. "I just love to talk about your money. Let me be very clear-I want your money. I deserve it. The church deserves

He peddles "covenant swords" and "prayer cloths" that he claims will bring the buyer freedom from fmancial troubles as well as from physical or emotional ailments. He has written that

"one of the first reasons for poverty is a lack of knowledge of God and His Word," and that "the Bible says that to withhold the tithe is to rob God." Parsley lives lavishly in a 7,500-square-foot house valued at more than $1 million. He refuses to disclose tion about the church's income or expenditures and has fought off several allegations from former employees charging gross misuses of church funds.30

Parsley is one of the masters at peddling this message of greed, hatred and intolerance as gospel truth. The Christian rhetoric, on the surface, is often the same. It is comfortable and predictable. The gestures are familiar. The reverence to God and nation, the deference to the authority of the Bible, do not appear to have changed. But the heart of the Christian religion, all that is good and compassionate within it, has been tossed aside, ruthlessly gouged out and thrown into a heap with all the other inner organs. Only the shell, the form, remains, its empty carcasss wrapped around these wolves like a cloak. Christianity is of no use to Parsley, Blackwell and the others. In its name they kill it.

CHAPTER NINE

God: The Commercial

There

be no liberty for a community which lacks the means by which to detect lies.

-*Walter Lippmann'*

rthur Blessitt sits with his large dark wooden cross, a wheel attached to the base, on a couch in the studios of the Trinity Broadcasting Network (TBN) in Tinicum, California. He and the host, Paul Crouch Jr., watch as Paul's younger brother Matt finishes an interview in the studio in Hollywood. The two men wait for the cue signaling they are on the air.

Blessitt, who has just completed a book called Give *a* J, is a

frequent guest on the network's most popular nightly two-hour variety show, *Praise*

He played a role in the conversion of

George W. Bush after meeting him in 1984 in Midland, Texas. The owners and founders of Trinity

Paul Crouch Sr. and

Jan Crouch, have carried out fund-raising appeals so Blessitt, who has a citation in the *Guinness*

of World

for "World's

Longest Walk," can carry his cross along roadsides in foreign countries. The show this evening, filled with the usual uplifting Christian music and interviews with Christian celebrities. such as the former NBA basketball star A. C. Green, is about to tum to the supernatural ponion of the program, the moment when the power of Jesus to perform miracles is, the hosts say, made visible and real.

"There is more excitement and joy in living with Jesus for one hour than all the carnal pleasures in a lifetime," Blessitt says into the camera when they begin.

"Amen," Paul Crouch Jr. adds.

The conversation centers on Blessitt's campaign, which began

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on Christmas day 1969, to traverse the globe

the wooden

cross on his shoulder. Blessitt, with a mop of gray hair, explains that he has walked "over 37,000 miles, almost one and a half times around the world, through 305 nations, island groups and territories" and taken "over 64 million steps.

"When you calculate the weight of each step with the weight of the cross," he says, he has carried "over 8 billion pounds, and I don't have one callus, one bunion, and I'm 65 years old and I never felt better in my life."

The taped applause track prompts the small studio crowd to clap.

"The obvious question is: Why?" asks Crouch, leaning toward his guest.

"Because Jesus spoke to me, I love Him," Blessitt answers.

in 1969 one night I was praying and Jesus said, 'Take the cross off the building on Sunset Boulevard'-where I had a Jesus night club on Sunset Strip-'put the cross on your shoulder, and carry it on the roadsides of the world and identify My message where the people are.' And by the grace of

God, I've walked through 50 countries at war. I've been in jail 24 times. I've been through Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan, saudi Arabia, North Sudan,

Somalia, everyplace, lifting up the cross, preaching Jesus. There are no walls. There are no barriers. The world is open. Jesus said, 'Go,'

and you go to live or die, but you go to do His will."

"You took the great commission literally," Crouch says, referring to the belief that Christians must leave their homes to vert nonbelievers.

"Yes, yes," Blessitt says.

"To go into all the world. And you are just about to do that,"

Crouch adds. "You have a few little island nations-"

"-well, they are not nations," Blessin says. "I have been to every nation, but there are a few remote islands, like the Chatham Islands and Zanzibar and some of these places. To have been in every inhabited

"-Wow-"

"-and Jesus has given the strength to do that and it is just amazing," Blessitt says.

look at the pictures on my wall. I look

at everything and it is a living miracle of what God has done."

Blessitt and his wife, Denise Irja, have just adopted a baby and recently moved to work out of the Heritage Christian Center in Denver, Colorado. He is on

to give tips on how to

witness and "reach a hurting world," but first Crouch promises dramatic video footage from a TBN

called *Arthur*

Blessitt: A Pilgrim.

The men sit back and watch the clip.

NARRATOR:

of a younger

In 1979, Arthur

journeyed into one of the most politically unstable areas of the world.

America. The trip ,was sponsored by the Trinity

Broadcasting Network.

PAUL CROUCH SR.: *(Over dark,*

We saw the

phones ring and the money pledged to buy what we lovingly dubbed the Holy Roller, the little four-wheel drive vehicle that had been given by the partners to assist Arthur in his travel and his journey down through Central America.

(Paul

Jan Crouch,

is wearing a flowing dress

like a

outfit, climb out of

cab of

is pulling small

caravan

hand

to Blessitt.)

PAUL CROUCH SR.: This absolutely unreal drama unfolded, and we were to learn later the most frightening and dangerous experiences of Anhur Blessitt's entire life.

Oan Crouch,

wig

down

on

bed

muted lighting.)

JAN CROUCH: *(Speaking in*

I really wasn't

thinking about Arthur Blessitt.... when all of a sudden I looked

The

up and the entire ceiling in the bedroom where we were sleeping had lit up. And I saw like it was a movie screen what was going on, what was happening in Nicaragua.

ARTHUR BLESSITT: I heard a banging on the side of the trailer.

I opened the trailer caravan door, and gunmen burst into our trailer.

JAN CROUCH: When I opened my eyes to look at it, I saw Arthur and he was just looking at me, and I had never really seen that look before. There was no fear. It was just like, "Pray, Jan, pray."

ARTHUR BLESSITT: They took me near the side of the van, the drive vehicle, and they stood me there and they lined up, seven gunmen and two on a truck with machine guns. They said they were going to kill me. When they raised the guns up and took aim, I realized at that moment,

are going to literally

shoot me now."

JAN CROUCH: And I stopped and I said, "Honey, Arthur Blessitt is in trouble and we have got to pray."

PAUL CROUCH SR.: All ofa sudden, Jan descended on me and half frightened me to death. . . . She seized my arm and said,

"Honey, Arthur's in trouble, and we've got to pray for him,"

NARRATOR: Blessitt explains that he decided he would not die without a Bible in his hand.

ARTHUR BLESSITT: In a momentary decision, as I heard the guy say,

dos," I turned instantly with my prayer. "Jesus, help me hit the keyhole." And I turned and stuck the key into the door, right in the hole first time, right in the door, and they were saying, "Don't move" in Spanish. I thought, "It doesn't matter if!

get shot in the front or the back." I opened the door, picked up a box that had Bibles in it. I set the box down and staned tearing off the top of the box, and it had these cords on it. It was very dif-

fleult to get the box open. I could see the gunmen's feet around me. They were pulling on my shoulder trying to get me to up. Finally, I got a whole load and put the Bibles in my arm and thought I would give them all a Bible. I was really anticipating getting one for myself. but I thought I would give them all a Bible before they shot me.

PAUL CROUCH SR.: We fell to our knees, right there in the bedroom in that little cottage in Phoenix. and began to cry out to God and pray and receive, knowing nothing about what Arthur was experiencing at that moment.

JAN CROUCH: We jumped down by the bed very quickly....

We held hands across the bed and prayed for OUf friend Arthur.

And all of a sudden I said, "Father, I ask you to send 12 big angels to fight for him right now."

ARTHUR BLESSITT: And when I stood up, there wasn't one gunman standing there. And I looked and there were six on the ground about 15 feet away and one with his feet sticking out the door of the trailer who had been knocked inside. I didn't know what had happened. I heard nothing. I saw nothing.

NARRATOR: Blessitt says he went over to the ones on the ground and offered them a Bible and some water, but they were and ran for the truck

and sped away. When he walked in the trailer, his friend Don said he thought he had been killed.

DON: I have just been saved a couple of years, and I grew up in bars. I know meat against meat. I heard blows and then the gunmen fell by the door, and one fell into the door. Didn't you hit them?

ARTHUR BLESSITT: I said no, I didn't do anything. The people in the village came running up and said they saw God here. They said they saw a bright flash of light and God was here. And all I could do was stand in the midst of that whole situation and say,

"Somebody must have been praying for me."

man," Paul Crouch Jr. says as the camera switches back to the studio amid heavy applause.

is very moving to look at that," Blessitt tells his host.

are you feeling?" Crouch asks softly.

"I feel the love that Paul and Jan had," he says.

don't under-

stand all about prayer, but God had them pray."

Crouch says.

there was a literal miracle that took place," Blessitt says.

"I feel the presence of God."

"Amen," Crouch says.

only thing 1 can say is, I have lived now for 36 years of walking around the world in the presence of God," Blessitt says.

Crouch says.

"I carried the cross," Blessitt says. "I know His presence."

Crouch says.

really, that is how 1 live," Blessitt says.

know Jesus is

with me. I know that I know that I know that 1know."

do you know?" Crouch asks in a whisper.

know

His word says so," Blessitt says as the ap-

plause track is again turned up, prompting the audience to clap.

said, 'I will be with you always.' I believe what He said."

them," Crouch encourages.

1believe another scripture: 'Where twO or three are gathered in my name there am 1in the midst of them.'"

"Amen," Crouch says, as an

piano plays soft music in

the background.

"And Paul, I have been so many times in places where there is not one believer around me," Blessitt says. "I have been with soldiers. I have been with terrorist groups. And I wiU just say to them, 'Would you say the name "Jesus"?' And when they say the name 'Jesus: the presence of Christ comes into that atmosphere.

And really, that is how I share Christ; that is how I witness."

The scene, with its high drama and emotion, its story of a mir·

acle and the divine intervention mediated by Paul and Jan Crouch,

is typical fare for Trinity Broadcasting. As Blessitt launches into a short pitch on the importance of knowing and accepting Jesus into your heart. Crouch reminds viewers that they call prayer

counselors at the toll-free number shown on the bottom of the screen. It is a short step from a prayer counselor to making a

"love gift" and becoming a partner in

Broadcasting. Above

all else, this is a business, a huge one, and those who know how to run it well, the Paul and Jan Crouches, the Pat Robensons and Benny HinDs. have grown wealthy and built massive media and personal empires on the gospel of prosperity.

The Crouches, who began their television evangelism with the disgraced Jim and Tammy Faye Bakker. wear gaudy costumes and sit during their popular nightly program in front of stained-glass windows that overlook faux Louis XVI sets awash in gold rococo and red velvet, glittering chandeliers and a gold-painted piano.

The emblem of the station, which Paul Crouch wears on the pocket of his blue double-breasted blazer, is a

with a British

lion and unicorn on each side and a white dove of peace in the middle. The couple, who collect nearly $1 million a year in salary the network, also have use of 30 ministry-owned homes, including twO sprawling multimillion·dollar oceanfront mansions in the resort town of Newport Beach, California, a mountain retreat near Lake Arrowhead and a ranch in Texas. They travel in a $7.2

million, 19-seat Canadair Thrbojet, drive luxury cars, and charge everything from dinners to antiques on company credit cards, according to former employees. They run

empire with 400 em-

ployees, out of walnut-paneled offices with plush velvet furniture.

The offices occupy half of the top floor of the network's headquarters in Costa

Jan, who is caked in makeup and appears to have undergone extensive plastic surgery-including, allegedly, breast implants-wears garish outfits and huge, flowing wigs. Her tear-filled stories of miracles-such as how her pet chicken was brought back to life when she was a child-or her accounts of prayer requests from

God:

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listeners. are used to extract money from viewers.l She and her husband speak as if they have a direct connection with God. an implication reinforced by constant stories of their personal involvement in divine miracles, such as the event involving Blessitt.

Their message. however, also has a dark side. Those who do not support their ministry, the Crouches often say, will see God turn against them. Viewers who have struggled with deep despair, and who believe that the world of miracles and magic is the only thing holding them back from the abyss. often find the threat potent and frightening. Bener, many feel. to send in money and not a chance.

you have been healed or saved or blessed through TBN and have not contributed to

station, you are robbing God and

will lose your reward in heaven," Paul Crouch said in a *Praise the* broadcast on November 7,1997.4 Couch said:

we pro-

claim death to anything or anyone that will lift a hand against this network and this ministry that belongs to You. God. It is Your work. it is Your idea, it is Your property. it is Your airwaves, it is Your world, and we proclaim death to anything that would stand in the way of God's great voice of proclamation to the whole world. In the name ofJesus, and all the people said.

Broadcasting Network is the world's largest televangelist organization, with programming beamed from some two satellites and thousands of cable and terrestrial channels in some 75 countries. It owns interests in stations in EI Salvador.

Spain and Kenya and has contracts with numerous other cable and satellite companies and station owners. Its programming is carried on more than 6,000 stations in the United States and abroad as well as the

The network is the platform for some of the

movement's most reactionary and bizarre preachers, including many from other countries. The success of the network lies in its array of programming and the variety of different "faith" messages it is willing to incorporate. It provides religious entertainment, children's programming. gospel music concens from Nashville,

live coverage of Christian events, lifestyle shows, health and beauty tips, financial counseling and prosperity tips, news and current events, Christian documentaries and feature films, teaching programs, worship services at megachurches and spirited revivals.

The messages range from the theologically conservative-embodied in the Southern Baptist preachers Charles Stanley and Adrian Rogers-to Catholic Ministries' Father Michael

to those

who preach the gospel of prosperity, such as Kenneth Copeland, Crefla Dollar and John Avanzini. The network broadcasts Dr. D.

James Kennedy, who is at the forefront of the movement to create a theocratic America, and it gives a voice to some of the outer fringes of the movement, such as the Christian exorcist Bob Larson and the popular healer Benny Hinn, who says that Adam was a superhero who CQuid fly to the moon and claims that one day the dead will be raised by watchingTBN from inside their coffins.7 1n a *the Lord* broadcast on October 19, 1999, Hinn told viewers that he will one day be able to raise the dead through his television broadcasts, that soon those who have lost loved ones will refuse to bury them but

him in

of

TV set for 24

I

rows of cas·

lining up in front of this TV set, and I

them

them

closer to the TV set, and as

coming closer I see loved

up the

of the

and letting them touch the

screen,

people are getting raised as their hands are touching that screen.

Hinn, who says he is a prophet who speaks with God daily, also tells followers that he has been transponed to heaven and regularly visions and revelations. He has predicted that one day Jesus would appear at one of his crusades. He claims to be able to heal the sick and told Larry King he had healed himself by watching a previously recorded broadcast ofone of his sermons. He also, like the Crouches, angrily lashes out at his critics, once saying: "Some-

times I wish God would give me a Holy Ghost machine gun. I'd blow your head o.ff!"IO This sentiment was echoed by the elder Crouch, who has attacked critics as "heresy hunters" and lambastes them as enemies of God who will soon feel God's wrath.

In an April 2, 1991, "Praise·a-Thon," Crouch let loose on his critics:

To hell with you! Get

ofmy life! Get

of the way! I say, get

out of God's way! Quit blocking God's bridges or going to

shoot you-if I

I don't even want to

talk to you or

hear

I don't want to see

ugly

The Crouches have repeatedly been embroiled in scandals in their three decades on television, including battles with the Federal Communications Commission over the legality of some of their station licenses. ll Lonnie Ford, Paul Crouch's chauffeur, said he had a homosexual relationship in 1996 with Crouch, something Crouch has vehemently denied. But Ford was, the network admit-ted, paid $425,000 and given housing in settlement when he threatened to go public with the charges shortly after the affair legedly took place. The story was first reported six years later by the *Los*

Angeles Times. 13 Disgruntled former employees complain about the lavish lifestyles of the Crouches, paid for by contribu-tors who are often of modest means.

None of this seems to dampen the enthusiasm-or lessen the coffers-of the network. The promise of miracles, coupled with the fear of falling out of the favor of God (and the Crouches), compels loyal "partners" to mail in monthly "love offerings." The network, expanding in areas such as the Middle East, dubs its programs in 11 different languages. It is watched by viewers in more than 5 million households in the United States each week and millions more overseas. And televangelists such as Pat Robertson, despite having networks that once dwarfed TBN, now buy time on the TBN network to reach a wider audience. The net-

work generates more than $170 million a year in revenue, according to tax filings reported by the *Los*

Viewers' contri-

butions make up two-thirds of the income, and the rest comes from fees imposed on those who want to

Crouch encourages viewers to send in checks for $1,000, even if they cannot afford it. Write the check anyway, he tells them, as a "step of faith," and the Lord will repay them many times over.

"Do you think God would have any trouble getting $1,000 extra to you

he asked during one

The constant appeals for money, the fantastic stories about gels and healings and miracles. and the opulence of the Crouches'

lifestyles are defended by many viewers who cling to the network.

The Crouches' wealth is merely proof, many say, of God's blessing and a sign that such blessings will one day flow to them as well, as long as they mail in their prayer offerings and love gifts and have faith.

The triviality of American popular culture, its emptiness and gossip, accelerates this destruction of critical thought. It expands the void, the mindlessness that makes the magic, mythology and irrationality of the Christian Right palatable. Television, the movement's primary medium, allows viewers to preoccupy selves with context-free infonnation. The homogenized empty chatter on the airwaves. the banal amusement and cliches, the bizarre doublespeak endlessly repeated on cable news channels and the huge

in sports stadiums have replaced

America's political, social and moral life. indeed replaced community itself. Television lends itself

to this world of signs

and wonders. to the narcissism of national and religious self-exaltation. Television discourages real communication. Its rapid frames and movement. its constant use of emotional images. its sudden shifts from one theme to an unrelated theme. banish logic and reason with dizzying perplexity. It, too, makes us feel good. It, too. promises to

and serve us. It, too. promises to lift us

up and thrill us. The televangelists have built their movement on

these commercial

The totalitarian creed of the Religious

Right has found in television the perfect medium. Its leaders know how television can be used to seduce and encourage us to walk away from the dwindling, less exciting collectives that protect and nurture us. They have mastered television's imperceptible,

slowly induced

hypnosis.

And

they understand

the

enticement of *credo quia absurdum-I* believe because it is absurd.

Arlene Jacques, wearing dark-framed

glasses and

with her hair pulled back, is wearing a bright red sequined shirt, flashy red sequin earrings and fire-engine red fingernail polish.

She is browsing with her

daughter Brandy in the

Gold, Frankincense and Myrrh gift shop on the ground floor of the Costa Mesa TBN headquarters, situated next to the San Diego Freeway. The headquarters is a gaudy, white wedding cake of a building with a dramatic front lobby that holds two spiral staircases winding upward, their railings ornate, gold-painted iron-work. Set in colored marble at the foot of the staircases, directly in front of the double glass doors, is the imperial-looking emblem of the network. Above the shoppers, the staircases converge on a huge white statue of the archangel Michael slaying the dragon, a I3-inch replica of which is on sale in the gift shop. The walls have gold-tinted mirrors and huge windows that allow visitors to look at the fountains, reflecting pools, sculptures, neoclassical colon-nades, manicured lawns and white lights that outline the building and the shrubs. It's Christmastime: elaborate light displays outline reindeer and hug the palm trees. On the top of the building, lights spell out "Happy Binhday Jesus."

Jacques, from Visalia, California, looks at the displays of books by various members of the Crouch family, the clothing with the TBN emblem, and trinkets such as the Mary and Baby Jesus rator Plate or the Coming

Medallion. This is her first visit to

TBN, although she has been a "partner" of the network for many years and has long made regular monthly contributions. She busily snaps pictures, including shots of herself in front of a gold grand

piano on the second floor. with her daughter Brandy. who is a nurse. They visited the virtual reality theater earlier in the day and walked through the re-creation of the Via Dolarosa, the route through Jerusalem by which Jesus carried the cross to his crucifixion. In the 50-seat theater she has seen one of the *End* movies, which pomay the apocalyptic end of the world, the death of nonbelievers and saving of the righteous, and she has felt the seats tremble during projected quakes and storms. She is about to head to the Heavenly Bistro for something to drink. The network has a similar complex near Dallas and a Christian entenainment center outside of Nashville. But there are few visitors today and the headquarters is nearly empty.

Jacques turned to the network 30 years ago at a time when she was "in a lot of pain." She was living

a tiny, run·down apart-

ment with her two small daughters, Brandy and Raque1, and had been recently divorced.

"I had never been a working parent," she says. "I was scared to death to go out into the working world. 1 was not real churched at the time. They were

speaking to me, Paul and Jan and the people at TBN, about my spiritual side. 1 knew Jesus, but 1 did not have a personal relationship with Jesus. God could know you personally, they told me, and 1 could know Him personally."

She met with a neighbor to pray and talk about changing her life. She watched the broadcasts, the promises of salvation, the stories about how finding God changes lives, melts away problems and leads to financial and emotional security. The broadcasts gave her comfort.

"I got down on my knees by myself by the couch," she remembers. "I got a great big Bible, a 90-pound Bible that my husband got overseas. it was a big white one with gold print, and 1 put my hands on it and said, 'God, please touch me, my life and children.'

Then 1 cried for three hours. 1 saw a slide show in front of my eyes. It seemed like every single wrong thing 1 had ever done flashed before my eyes and 1 was truly sorry."

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She visited various churches, but nothing gave her the glow of the TBN broadcasts. She began to pray daily, sometimes for long stretches. And she began to watch, slowly drawn into the culture and the message preached by Paul and Jan Crouch.

was taking a load of clothes down to the washing machine in the basemen[of the apartment bUilding," she says.

were

poor, living on welfare and food

and when I came back

upstairs I felt that I wanted to kneel by the bed and pray. I lifted up my hands and

to talk in a loud language I had never

heard before. I thought, 'It's happening. My mind is thinking one and something different is coming out of my mouth. I am speaking in prayer language.'"

She found a job driving a school bus, but her emotional life mained in turmoil and the family often had a hard time paying bills. She struggled with depression. There were nights she could not sleep. She

as if she was hanging on by her fingertips and

there were few people listening or willing to help.

don't know if you have ever been in a place in your life where

takes effort to walk from one room to the next," she says. "It takes so much effort. I was in those places several times.

But just by hearing the worship on TBN, by listening to different people speak the word of God, it gave me strength. The network is on 24 hours a day, seven days a week. The pastor of your church and all your wonderful friends do not want you to call them up at four a.m. in tears when you feel such total despair. But you can call TBN. You can call TBN and there are people who actually speak to you. You can speak to a real, live person. They ask who you are and what you want to pray about. You can do this 24

hours a day.

"There is power in prayer," she says. "Not only do you feel different; you feel more peaceful. In time you see answers to those prayers. Nothing happened instantly, but you know you can actu·

ally live another day, and you get to a place where you can keep on living."

When she called the toll-free "prayer line," the number of which is always visible at the bottom of the TV screen, she was asked by a "prayer warrior" on the other end for name and address. The information was put into a direct-mail one of

the network's most successful fund-raising tools. Her calls to prayer partners. she says, gave her strength. But they also led her, a young, single mother on welfare, to take some of her meager income and mail *it* to the network.

"I

living on welfare, collecting food stamps," she says,

"and I would tape fifteen cents to one of their little cards and mail it

Her life had always been turbulent. She started working very young, in her father's restaurant. There was little time for schooL

She says she came from a "dysfunctional family" in which there was "no value of people, no value for life, for relationships and how to talk and relate to people.

didn't know kids didn't work," she says.

parents were

divorced early on, and I lived with my dad and my stepmother since I was about 10. I did not know some kids got to eat dinner with their family, do their homework and go to bed."

She barely made it through high school and eloped a couple years later with a man in the Navy. They went to Los Angeles and got married. He was sent to Vietnam. When he came back from the war, the marriage was tempestuous. They split and numerous times until they finally gave up.

remember as a little girl living in that apartment," says Brandy. "My mom was a total Jesus freak. She used to bring homeless people in from the park and feed them and pray over them. She loved everybody with the love of

Arlene baptized homeless people who visited in a small inflat-able children's pool. The pool was where she also baptized her daughters. She taught her daughters that, as Paul and Jan Crouch said. faith alone would be enough to let them survive. Jesus, if you had enough faith, would take care of you.

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"For us, for my sister and I, to this day we know that God is so real," Brandy adds. "We know God brought us through and prous. One time me and my sister and mom got on our knees and prayed for our rent money. We left. We went to do the dry at the laundromat. When we got back, there was a check in the middle of the floor. not like it was pushed under the door, but right in the middle of the floor. It was for our rent, and it was signed by Jesus Christ, and Wells Fargo cashed

But the gospel of prosperity has a more insidious effect than the personal enrichment of leaders such as Paul and]an Crouch at the expense of gullible, desperate and often impoverished followers. When it is faith alone that will determine your well-being, when faith alone cures illness, overcomes emotional distress and ensures financial and physical security, there is no need for outside, secular institutions, for social-service and regulatory agencies, to exist. There is no need for fiscal or social responsibility. Although many of the followers of the movement rely, or have relied in the past, on government agencies to survive, the belief system they embrace is hostile to all secular intervention. To put trust in secular

institutions is to lack faith, to give up on God's magic and miracles. The message being preached is one that dovetails with the message of neoconserva-tives who want to gut and destroy federal programs, free themselves from government regulations and taxes and break the back of all organizations, such as labor unions. that seek to impede maximum profit.

The popular Christian textbook

History

cites Genesis, which calls for mankind to "have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth" (Genesis 1:26-27) as evidence that the Bible calls for "Bible-believing Christians" to take dominion of America and the world: "When God brings Noah through the flood to a new earth. He reestablishes the Dominion Mandate but now delegates

to man the responsibility for governing other men." Ii The authors write that God has called the United States to become a Christian nation and "make disciples of all nations." 11

The book fuses the Christian message with the celebration of unrestricted capitalism. It denounces income tax as "idolatry"

and property tax as "theft," and in a chapter titled "Christian Economics," calls for the abolishment of inheritance taxes.13 This indoctrination is designed to form a cadre of young believers who will follow biblical rather than secular law. They are told that when the two laws dash, they as believers must defy secular authorities. And they are taught to judge others not by what they do but by their fidelity to Christian doctrine.

"Even if Christians manage to outnumber others on an issue and we sway our Congressman by

numbers, we

up in

the dangerous promotion of democracy," the book reads. "We really do not want representatives who are swayed by majorities, but rather by correct principles."

The book also teaches students that a Christian's primary responsibility is to create material wealth. God will oversee the crease and protection of natural resources. *America's History* belittles

environmentalists, who see natural re-

sources as fragile and limited, and says of those who hold these concerns that they "lack faith in God's providence and conse-quently, men will find fewer natural resources.... The Christian knows that the potential in God is unlimited and that there is no shortage of resources in God's earth." The book blithely dismisses the threat of global warming and overpopulation, saying, "Christians know that God has made the earth sufficiently large with plenty of resources to accommodate all the

wrote that man needs lies. And the Jan and Paul

Crouches of the world are perfect emissaries of the belief system needed to dismantle the power of the federal government and un-lease the fetters on corporations. Moral life is reduced in their ideology to personal, individual piety. All well-being lies in the hands

Commercial

of God-or, more specifically, the hands of those who pose as bassadors for God. The power of the supreme collective, of the corporation,

increasingly unchecked when a society accepts that fate is determined by a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. In this world individual rights-once safeguarded through the peting collectives of diverse social, religious or ethnic groups, trade unions, government regulatory agencies, advocacy groups, independent media and judiciaries, and schools and universities that do not distort the world through an ideological lens-are neutered.

This new world of signs and wonders, of national and gious self·exaltation and elaborate spectacle, makes people feel good. It offers the promise of

God's protection and service. This new world promises to lift them up and thrill them, alI the while calling on them to do away with the dwindling collectives that in fact heretofore have protected them. When individuals are finally emasculated and alone, bereft of the help of competing coHee·

rives, they cannot defend their rights or question the abuses of their overlords. When there is no other place to turn for help other than the world of miracles and magic, mediated by those who grow rich off those who suffer, when fealty to an ideology comes a litmus test for individual

tyranny follows.

CHAPTER TEN

Apocalyptic Violence

... This was a "moment of madness"-a revolutionary, romantic moment when an entire society seems to be up for grabs. In these moments, fundamental change appears irresistible; for a brief moment, "all seems possible, all within reach." Across time, people who get caught up in moments of madness imagine that their own "radiant vision" is at hand: a workers' paradise, a grassroots democracy, fraternite-egalite-liberte, or the Second Coming ofJesus. The utopian imagination is-suddenly, powerfully, briefly-inflamed by the immediate prospect of radical change, by visions of an apocalypse now.

D.

the "Great

of the 1700s 1

he Gilead Baptist Church outside of Detroit is on a four-lane highway called South Telegraph Road. The drive down South Telegraph Road to the church, a warehouse-like structure surrounded by black asphalt parking lots, is a depressing gauntlet of boxy, cut-rate motels with names like Melody Lane and Best Value Inn. The highway is flanked by a flat-roofed Walgreens, Blockbuster, discount liquor stores, Taco Bell, McDonald's, Bob's Big Boy. Sunoco and Citgo gas stations. a Ford dealership. Nails USA, the Dollar Palace, Pro Quick Lube and U-Haul. The tawdry display of cheap consumer goods. emblazoned with neon. lines both sides of the road. a dirty brown strip in the middle. It is a sad reminder that something has gone terribly wrong with ica. with its inhuman disregard for beauty and balance. its obsession with speed and utilitarianism. its crass commercialism and its

SUVs and trucks and greasy junk food. This disdain

for nature, balance and harmony is part of the deadly, numbing assault against community. Ten or

minutes negotiating the

traffic down South Telegraph Road make the

attraction of

the End Times-the obliteration of this world of alienation, noise and distonion-comprehensible. The manufacturing jobs in the Detroit auto plants nearby are largely gone, outsourced to other nations with cheaper labor. The paint is flaking off the cramped houses that lie in grid patterns off the highway. The plagues of alcoholism, divorce, drug abuse, poverty and domestic violence make the internal life here as depressing as the external one. And the congregation gathering today in this church waits for the final, welcome relief of the purgative of violence, the vast cleansing that will lift them up into the heavens, and leave the world they despise, the one they ruined or that was ruined for them, to be wracked by plagues and flood and fire until it, and all those they blame for the debacle of their lives, are consumed and destroyed by God. It is a theology of despair. And for many, the apocalypse

happen soon enough.

The guru of the End TImes movement is a small, elderly, gnomelike man with his hair dyed coal black, a battery·powered and a pedantic, cold demeanor. His name is Timothy LaHaye, a Southern Baptist minister and coauthor, along with Jerry Jenkins, of the *Left*

series of Christian apocalyptic

thrillers that provide the graphic details of raw mayhem and cruelty that God will unleash on all nonbelievers when Christ returns and raptures

Christians into heaven. AstOnishingly, the novels are among the best-selling books in America with more than 62 million in print. They have been made into movies, as well as a graphic video game in which teenagers can blow away nonbelievers and the army of the Antichrist on the streets of New York City. These books have come to express, for many

the Christian

Right, the yearning they feel for the Rapture, the end of history, the end of time. Once Christ returns and believers are lifted into heaven, the

will, they are told, enter a period of tribulation.

The tribulation will lead to a final, gruesome battle between Christ and the forces of the Antichrist, with

bursting

open from head to toe at every word that proceeded out of the mouth of the Lord as he spoke to the captives within Jerusalem.'"

In the novels those Christians, who hastily converted once the righteous were lifted into the clouds, have to drive carefully to avoid hitting splayed and filleted corpses of men and women and horses. The soldiers in the army of the Antichrist, facing the warrior Christ, are defeated in the final moments as "their flesh solved, their eyes melted. and their tongues disintegrated." And after pages of graphic violence, readers are told that the soldiers of the Antichrist "stood briefly as skeletons in now-baggy uniforms, then dropped in heaps of bones as the blinded horses continued to fume and rant and rave."l

LaHaye and Jenkins had to distort the Bible to make all this fit-the Rapture, along with the graphic details of the end of the world and the fantastic time line, is never articulated the

Bible-but all this is solved by picking out obscure and highly fig-urative passages and turning them into fuzzy allegory to fit the apocalyptic vision. This stygian nightmare is, rather, a visceral and disturbing expression of how believers feel about themselves and the world. The horror of apocalyptic violence-the final aesthetic of the movement-at once frightens and thrills followers. It feeds fantasies of revenge and empowerment. It is an ominous reminder that failing to follow God's commands will ensure their own eternal damnation. LaHaye has a checkered past that dudes years working for the John Birch Society and many more peddling quack theories such as "temperament analysis," which purports to be a system to identify predominant characteristics.

strengths and weaknesses to help people make vocational. personal and marital decisions. He was previously known for books such as *Spirit Controlled Temperament,*

Temperaments, The

Male

and *Your Temperament: Discover Its*

all

variants of

In short, before becoming the champion of

a Christian America and the apocalypse he made his living as a fortune-teller. LaHaye has helped found and lead numerous right-wing groups, including the Council for National Policy, and he is not only the nation's

author, but also one of the do-

minionists' most powerful propagandists.

LaHaye has come to the conference with his wife, Beverly, who founded Concerned Women of America, an antifeminist group with 540,000 women "who were committed to protecting the rights of the family through moral

They were the

early pioneers in the Christian Right's attack on the school textbook industry, helping to orchestrate a series of lawsuits against publishers who printed material they found offensive or Christian. They sit together at a table to sign their books, and the line snakes down the corridor, with many people clutching multiple books for signatures. LaHaye, along with two other well-known apocalyptic preachers-including Gary Frazier, the glib, silver-tongued founder of the Texas-based Discovery Ministries, Inc., which

"Walking Where Jesus Walked" tours in Israel-travels the country holding daylong End Time conferences, such as today's event at the Gilead Baptist Church. Tickets to the event in Detroit cost $20. Frazier and LaHaye also

pilgrims to visit

Israel, where they stand on the hill of Megiddo-better known as Armageddon-that in the Book of Revelation is the site of the final battle between the forces of Christ and the Antichrist. In the lobby of the church, just outside the sanctuary, a television set on a stand continuously

one of the tapes of a "Walking Where

Jesus Walked" tour next to a table fiUed with Frazier's books, CDs and DVDs.

laHaye insists that everything in the Bible is literally true. All events in the modem world are described and represented, he says, in the Bible. All has been predicted. The Bible is primarily a book of prophecies that predict the events that will take place shortly before the worldwide cataclysm. This belief relies on a curi-ous hybrid of allegory and literal interpretation. When Revelation

like

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9:1-11 says that monsters will appear whose faces are "like human faces," with "hair

women's

"teeth like lions' teeth,"

"scales like iron breastplates" and "tails like scorpions and stings,"

laHaye assures us they will appear. These monsters, which will have what look like crowns of gold on

heads, will torture un-

believers for five months, although not kill them. He quotes from some of the more disturbing passages in the Book of Revelation to remind his listeners of how terrible it will be for nonbelievers: in those days men will

seek death and will not find it; they will long to die and death will fly from them" (Revelations 9:6).

"Everything we believe is based on the principles of this book," LaHaye tells the group from the church pulpit, holding up his Bible.

"How do we know this is a supernatural book?" LaHaye asks.

"Fulfilled prophecies prove that this was not written by men." he says. "One thousand prophecies, as the Bible tells us, five hundred of which have already been fulfilled:'

The apocalyptic fantasy calls on believers to turn their backs on the crumbling world around them. This theology of despair is empowered by widespread poverty, violent crime. incurable diseases. global warming. war in the Middle East and the threat of nuclear war. All these events presage the longed-for obliteration of the Earth and the glorious moment of Christ's return. In this scenario, the battle at Armageddon will be unleashed from the Antichrist's worldwide headquarters in Babylon once the Jews again have control of IsraeL The war in Iraq, along with the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians, only brings the world one step closer to the end.

LaHaye, his head poking up from behind the wooden pulpit, tells the story of the origins of his series of apocalyptic books to those in the pews in front of him. He was on an airplane, he says, watching a pilot flirt with an attractive flight attendant. The pilot had a wedding ring. The flight attendant did not. He wondered what would happen if the Rapture happened at that moment.

Violence

hap-

war

Nebuchadnezzar

sees

What would happen if hundreds of millions of saved Christians were raptured into heaven and the unsaved left behind, including those who were insufficient Christians, along with Muslims, Catholics and Jews? He convinced Jerry Jenkins, a former sports-writer, to help him set his vision down in a series of novels. He and Jenkins went on to imagine the Rapture and what would pen when it set loose the Tribulation and a worldwide war. In their vision, this

would be waged by a band of new believers,

called the Tribulation Force, against Satan and the Antichrist. In the end, seas and rivers would turn to blood, searing heat would burn men alive, ugly boils would erupt on the skin of the disfavored, and 200 million ghostly, demonic warriors would sweep across the planet, exterminating one-third of the world's population. Those who join forces with the Antichrist in the *Left Behind* series, true to LaHaye's conspiracy theories, include the United Nations, the European Union, Russia, Iraq, all Muslims, the media, liberals, freethinkers and "international bankers." The Antichrist, who heads the United Nations, eventually moves his headquarters to Babylon, These demonic forces battle the remaining Christian believers-those who converted after the Rapture took place, remnants of extremist American militia groups, who in the novels are warriors for Christ, and the 144,000 Jews who convert. This, through pages of dense, stilted and leaden prose, is what has captivated tens of millions of American readers. And laHaye tells those in front of him that he believes that their generation may be the "terminal" generation, He warns his listeners to get right with God as fast as they can because there is not much time left.

Gary Frazier, with his thick head of silver hair, is the most engaging of the speakers. He has a soft Texas twang, at times a soar-ing eloquence and easy cadence. He begins by flashing a drawing of a monster, taken, he says, from a dream of Nebuchadnezzar that was interpreted for the king by Daniel in Second Daniel. King in his dream a statue with a head of gold,

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back

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iron teeth, bronze claws, arms and chest of silver, stomach and thighs of bronze, legs of iron. and feet of iron and day.

"'Here's what it means,'" Frazier quotes Daniel as saying.

"'You, Nebuchadnezzar. are the head. That's the Babylonian Empire. You rule over the whole world, but there'll come a second empire behind you: and historically, we know now as we look back, that was the MOOo-Persian Empire," Frazier explains that the stomach and thighs of bronze are the Hellenistic Empire. The two legs of iron, he says, represent the Roman Empire.

"You see what God did was in this simple

of Daniel,

God set the boundaries, the parameters, that there would never be more than four world empires in the entire history of time,"

Frazier explains. "It would be the Babylonians defeated by the Medes and the Persians, who were then later defeated by the Greeks, who were defeated by Rome, but the interesting part is found in the two feet and the ten toes of part iron and part plate."

He tells the congregation that the 10 toes stand for ethnically mixed cultures that will unite and rise up to dominate the world before the Rapture. He describes this empire as the European Union, or what he says is a revived form of the Roman Empire.

This final empire will be destroyed by God to usher in the year reign of Christ.

Frazier says the final chapter in human history started in 1948

with the foundation of the state of Israel, something predicted by the Bible. Less noticed but equally imponant, he tells the crowd, was the 1948 Benelux Conference that brought together Holland, Luxembourg and Belgium. This too, he says, fulfilled biblical prophecy. Just as God had to restore Jews to the land of Israel fore the End Times, so tOO did God have

raise Europe

up

in order to bring to pass this revived form of the ancient Roman Empire."

He explains that while each of the other empires fell, Rome never gone away," his voice dipping ominously. Instead of falling to an outside invader, Rome "collapsed," "imploded," due

to its own "degradation and perversion." "You see, there's never been a society in the history of the world that has openly accepted and embraced homosexuality and lesbianism that has survived,"

he explains, because while homosexuals and lesbians may not reproduce, "they are busy recruiting."

"We're seeing the shaping, the rebirthing, the revising of the ancient Roman Empire that will ultimately be the world power,"

Frazier says of the European Union, the figure of the metallic man with the iron legs on the screen behind him.

He explains that Europe, because it has so few Bible-believing Christians, will not see large sections of its population lifted to heaven in the Rapture. The United States, however, will be devastated when tens of millions of its Christians disappear, including half of the military. America will suddenly

"a Third

World" power, and Europe, ruled by the Antichrist, will dominate the planet.

"These prophecies were never given to scare us but to prepare us for the second coming ofJesus Christ," he says.

The second sign of the End Times, he says, will be the rise of radical Islam. This too, he says, is predicted in the Bible.

"Now," he says, "I realize that we're living in a community that has a large Arab constituency, I want you to know something as I begin this portion of this particular message. Not all Muslims are terrorists, I want you to know that. But I also want you to know that to date every terrorist has been a Muslim, Hello? I want you also to know that the scripture's clear on a couple of things, and I'm going to say some things today in the next few moments that may be construed as being intolerant, I want you to understand that. I've been called that on more than one occasion.

And if you get mad at me about it. you'll get over it, all right?

"In the days following 9/11," Frazier says. "I heard our leadership say that we're not at war with the religion of Islam, that there were Islamic radicals

who had taken over the religion and they're the ones we have a problem with. Folks, I'm here to tell

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you right now, I want to apologize to you on behalf of our dent and our political leadership because they lied to us. We *are* at war with the religion of Islam, and it is not a handful of radical lamists who are taking over the religion and hijacking it."

He speaks about the child

in the war between Iran

and Iraq. in which the Iranian clerics sent young boys into the minefields to clear the way for troops and returned their remains, Frazier says, in urns to their families.

"Can you

to me how in the West that we would un-

derstand a person who would strap dynamite upon themselves and blow themselves up along with innocent men and women and children with the promise that they would have seventy brown-haired-I mean blond-haired, blue-ered-virgins for their unlimited sexual pleasure in this place

paradise? And the

parents of that person then throw a

celebrating the de-

struction of their child. You want to tell me you understand that kind of mentality?

"Islam,"

says dramatically, "is a satanic religion."

He tells the crowd that his honesty and candor have brought him threats. He insists he has Muslim friends and that some Muslims who live in America love this country. But he warns about "a second kind of Muslim" who is in America for "the wrong reasons."

These Muslims want to export their religion and achieve their goal of "world domination," he explains.

"You show me a country that is dominated by Muslims, and I'll show you a

where people are dying, where there are

no freedoms or rights, and people being persecuted on a daily basis," he says. "God help us if they ever were to get in control, in charge here in the United States of America."

He warns of Muslim "sleeper cells" waiting to carry out new terrorist attacks. He illustrates his point with a hypothetical story about a Muslim

doctor forced to accept a nefarious mission or ceive the heads of his three children in a box.

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secular-humanist

Apocalyptic Violence

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Frazier stops, pauses and slowly scans the crowd, which sits silently, expectantly for his next sentence.

uI thank God for our men and women who are fighting over there because if they weren't fighting there, we'd be fighting right here in the streets of America. I'm convinced of that," he says, and the sanctuary erupts in loud applause.

Once the Antichrist takes power, the second temple in Jerusalem will be rebuilt. Followers of the Antichrist will be branded on their hands and foreheads with "the mark of the Beast," which Frazier says could well be "biochips" implanted under the skin. It will be impossible to buy and sell in the new world without this mark. Those who convert to Christ will receive

"the mark of the Father" on their foreheads, but they will become outcasts and persecuted in the Antichrist's worldwide empire.

Most

be martyred and killed.

"Do you see this?" he asks. "We're the first generation that's ever had the possibility of this happening in our lives.

"Does that apply to you?" he asks.

you have to be con-

cerned about taking the mark? Absolutely not. You can't have but one mark. You're safe if you already *have* it-the blood of Jesus Christ that cleanses away my sin and yours."

He goes on to say that the loved ones of many in this room, who are not *saved,* will be branded with the mark of the Beast because they will be left behind.

America, according to Frazier, LaHaye and many other leaders in the movement, is being ruled by evil, clandestine organizations that hide behind the veneer of liberal, democratic groups. These clandestine forces seek to destroy Christians. They spread their demonic,

ideology through front groups such as

the American Civil Liberties Union, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, the National Organization for Women, Planned Parenthood, the Trilateral Commission and

"the major TV networks, high-profile newspapers and news-magazines," the U.S. State Department, major foundations (Rock-

"and

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efeller, Carnegie. Ford), the United Nations, "the left wing of the Democratic Party," Harvard, Yale

2,000 other colleges and

universities."

America must repent, Frazier tells his audience. It must ask God to cleanse the moral stains that infect the nation and its godless inhabitants. The nation must swiftly dismantle the barriers between church and state and bring God back into the schools.

the government, the media. the

industry, the work-

place, the couns and the home. Time is funning out. If America, as a nation. does not get right with God very soon, it will face terrible retribution. The sins that have befallen America, the moral license, the high rates of premarital sex, homosexuality, abortion, pornography, the adultery and the greed and lust that have beset the country must be stamped out. America must

submis-

sive and heed God's prophets or be destroyed. If the Christians in this room fail, if they do not wipe out vice, sin and corruption, if they do not establish a Christian America soon, God will begin to carry out acts of vengeance.

Frazier ends the conference with a call for those in the room to commit or

their souls to Christ.

"This afternoon as we bring our time together to a close, it's not about being a Baptist; we went through that earlier. It is not about being a Methodist, or charismatic, or Assembly of God or an Episcopalian," he says softly. "It is about knowing in your soul."

He asks those before him if they are sure that if Christ appeared today they would go to heaven.

"I'm not trying to trick you," he implores the bowed heads.

"I'm trying to reason with you. For you see, one day the life that you and I know will be *over.* So I just wonder, is there a stirring in your heart? Am I speaking to you? Is He calling your name? He is, He is knocking on the door of your life? The door handle is on the other side. Where does it open? You have to open it. How do you do that? Well, the way I did it years ago was to calIon the name of

Apocalyptic

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the Lord, and I prayed. I'm going to ask you this afternoon if there is a stirring in your hean:' He prays:

"Dear Lord Jesus, I know that I'm a sinner, and right now as an act of my own

will, I agree with You that I have sinned, and I

want to ask You to forgive me of the sin that separates me from You. Come into my life; save my soul-and right now, with heads bowed and eyes closed, I just wonder if any of you have prayed that prayer. Here is what I'm

going to ask you to do: Will you lift your head and look at me and make eye contact with me? I just want to

your face. No one is looking around. If you prayed that prayer, here is what I'm going to ask you to do-will you lift your head and look at me and make eye contact with me? I just want to see your face. No one is looking around. If you prayed that prayer and you really mean it then just lift your head, look at me so I can see your ... God bless you, God bless you ... I can't really see the balcony because of the angie here, but ifyou are in the balcony will you slip your hand up for just a moment ... God bless you, God bless you, yep, yeah, God bless you ... you ... you ... and God bless you back there:'

Several people in the pews begin weeping softly.

Frazier tells them God has

their sins away.

now when God looks at you, he doesn't see your sins, your

He sees the blood of Jesus that washed your sin

away," he intones.

He

all those who raised their hands or looked him in the eye to stand and come down to the front of the church. A couple dozen people slowly

their way past those in the pews to walk

down the aisles to the front. Frazier gathers them around him in a tight circle. As the group forms, several church members wearing tags that say "counselor" silently enter the sanctuary through the double doors at the back. They wait, hands folded in front of them, to pray with the new converts, to tell them they need to come to church and to offer to help guide them toward new life.

thanks God for looking past the congregation's sins.

He tells the small group in front of him not to go back to their friends or family. not to retrieve their belongings from the pews.

"We are going to ask you to walk right back to that door." he says, pointing to where the counselors with the name tags are waiting to receive the group. "Would you all just step right through that door? And while they are going, folks, can we just do what the angels in heaven are doing?"

He starts to clap. The crowd follows his lead. The men and women file down the aisle as the crowd applauds. each being met by an individual counselor who takes their arm and guides them to a secluded comer in the lobby. The process begins.

What I watch reminds me of a

spring afternoon nearly 25

years ago, when Dr. James Luther Adams, my ethics professor at Harvard Divinity School, told us that when we were his age-he was then close to SO-we would all be fighting the "Christian fascists. "

The warning came at the moment Pat Robertson and other radio and televangelists began speaking about a new political gion that would direct its efforts at taking control of all institutions, including mainstream denominations and the government.

Its stated goal was to use the United States to create a global Christian empire. It was hard, at the time, to take such fantastic rhetoric seriously, especially given the buffoonish quality of leaders in the Christian Right who expounded it. But Adams warned us against the blindness caused by intellectual snobbery. The Nazis, he said, were not going to return with swastikas and brown shirts. Their ideological inheritors in America had found a mask for fascism in patriotism and the pages of the Bible.

Adams was not a man to use the word "fascist" lightly. He was in Germany in 1935 and 1936 and worked with the underground anti-Nazi church, known as the Confessing Church, with dissidents such as Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Adams was eventually de-tained and interrogated by the Gestapo, who suggested he might

want to consider returning to the United States. It was a sugges-tion he followed. He left on a night train with framed portraits of Adolf Hitler placed over the contents inside his suitcase to hide the rolls of home movie film he took of the so-called German Christian Church, which was pro-Nazi, and the few individuals who defied them, including the theologians Karl Barth and Albert Schweitzer. The ruse worked. The border police lifted the tops of the suitcases, saw the portraits of the Fuhrer and closed them up again. I watched hours of the grainy black-and-white films as he narrated in his apartment in Cambridge.

He saw in the Christian Right, long before we did, disturbing similarities with the German Christian Church and the Party, similarities, he said that would, in the event of prolonged social instability, catastrophe or national crisis, see American fascists, under the guise of Christianity. rise to dismantle the open society. He despaired ofliberaIs, who he said, as in Nazi Germany, mouthed empty platitudes about dialogue and inclusiveness that

made them ineffectual and impotent. Liberals, he said, did not understand the power and allure of evil or the cold reality of how the world worked. His long discussions with church leaders and theologians in Nazi Germany-some of whom collaborated with the regime, some of whom resisted and most of whom remained silent-were the defining experiences of his life. He was preoccupied with how liberal democracies. which could never hope to compete with the fantastic, utopian promises of personal and collective salvation offered by totalitarian movements, could resist.

Adams was a close friend of the theologian Paul Tillich, a vocal opponent of the Nazis who in 1933 became the first non-Jewish professor barred from German universities and soon went into exile. TIllich, he reminded us. taught that the role of the church was in society. that the depth of its commitment and faith were measured by its engagement with politics and culture. It was this engagement that alone gave faith its vibrancy and worth. Tillich did not retreat from the looming crisis around him. He spoke out

teach

Democracy

coexistence.

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prom-

against the intolerance and hatred preached by the Nazis before they came to power. And Tillich angrily chastised those in the church who. preoccupied with narrow Christian piety, were passive. He thundered against this complacency and begged Christians to begin to "take time seriously."

Adams had seen how the mask of religion hides irreligion. He reminded us that "our world is full to bursting with faiths, each contending for allegiance." He told us that Hitler claimed to the meaning of faith. Mussolini used to shout, "Believe. follow, and act," and told his followers that fascism, before being a party, had been a religion. Human history is not the struggle between religion and irreligion, Adams said. "It is veritably a battle of faiths, a battle of the gods who claim human allegiance."

Democracy is not, as these Christo-fascists claim, the enemy of faith.

keeps religious faith in the private sphere, en-

suring that all believers have an equal measure of protection and practice mutual tolerance. Democracy sets no religious ideal. It simply ensures

It permits the individual to avoid

subsumed by the crowd-the chief goal of totalitarianism.

which seeks to tell all citizens what to believe. how to behave and how to speak. The call to obliterate the public and the private wall that keeps faith the prerogative of the individual means the obliteration of democracy. Once this wall between church and state. or party and state. is tom down, there is an open and subtle warfare against love. which in an open society is another exclusive prerogative of the individual. In the totalitarian world, there are those worthy of love and those unworthy of it. In the totalitarian world, the private sphere becomes the concern of the state. This final restriction of the freedom to love-the freedom of a Christian to love a Muslim or the freedom to love those branded by the state as the enemy-heralds the death of the open society. The ises of Christian harmony, unity, happiness-in short a utopia-held forth by the dominionists have a seductive quality that will never be countered by the tepid offerings of democrats, who at

Violence

ene-

true

"projection"

hard

enemy

many

and

unaccept-

able

aspects

attributed

enemy

the

intellectual,

paranoid

pedantry.

Secret

organiza-

set

imitated

vestments,

an

ritual

and

an

hierarchy.

and

quasi-secret

and

ideological

war

Spokesmen

"crusades"

admiration

discipline

forth.

6

Apocalyptic

best can offer citizens the opportunity to seek their own happiness and construct their own meaning.

We must, Adams also told us, watch closely what these new fascists accused their opponents of planning. For radical movements expose their

own intentions and goals *by* tarring their mies with their own nefarious motives. These movements assume that those they attack are, like themselves, also hiding their agenda, also plotting to silence and eradicate opponents. This common form of

was, on a smaller scale, on display

during the Florida recount in 2000. The Republicans accused At Gore of attempting to steal the election through court fiat, the very theft being secretly orchestrated by the Republicans. Richard Hofstadter was one of the first to grasp the role of projection in

"The Paranoid Style in American Politics": *It is*

to resist the conclusion that this

is on

counts the projection of the self; both the ideal the

of the self are

to him. The

may be

cosmopolitan

but the

will outdo him in

the apparatus of scholarship, even of

tions

up to combat secret organizations give the same flattery.

The Ku Klux Klan

Catholicism to the point of donning

priestly

developing

elaborate

equally

elaborate

The John Birch Society emulates Communist

cells

operation through "front" groups

preaches a ruthless prosecution of the

along lines

very similar to those it *finds in the Communist enemy.*

of the various fundamentalist anti-Communist

openly

express their

for the dedication and

the

Communist cause calls

Adams, like Bonhoeffer, did not believe that those who would fight effectively in coming times of turmoil, a fight that for him was an integral part of the biblical message, would arise from the

Harvard

their

Nazi

"

Fortune

Here

The

Times

dangerous

American

fascist

is

the

in

American

in

institutional church or the liberal. secular elite. His critique ofthe prominent research universities. along with the media, was with-ering. These institutions-self-absorbed. compromised by their close relationship with

government and corporations, given enough of the pie to be complacent- were unwilling to deal with the fundamental moral questions and inequities of the age. They had no stomach for a battie that might cost them their prestige and comfort. He saw how easily the German universities had been Nazified. He told me, I suspect only half in jest, that if the Nazis took over America, "60 percent of the

faculty would

begin

lectures with the

salute. He had seen academics

at the University of Heidelberg, including the philosopher Martin Heidegger, raise their arms stiffly to students before class. Adams also reminded us that American intellectuals and industrialists openly flined with fascism in the 1930s. Mussolini's "corporatism." which created an unchecked industrial and business aris-tocracy. appealed to many American industrialists at the time, who saw it as an effective counterweight to Roosevelt's New Deal. In July 1934,

magazine lavished praise on the Italian

dictator for his defanging of labor unions and his empowerment of industrialists at the expense of workers. And Sinclair Lewis's 1935 novel *It Can't Happen*

told the story of a conservative

politician, "Buzz" Windrip, backed by a nationally syndicated radio host, Bishop Peter Paul Prang, who is elected president and becomes a dictator to save the nation from welfare cheats, sex, crime and a liberal press.

New York

in 1944 asked Vice President Henry Wallace

to answer the questions: What is a fascist? How many fascists have we? How dangerous are they? The Vice President's answers were published on April 9, 1944, as the war against the Axis powers and Japan was drawing to a close. He wrote:

The really

. ..

the man who wants

to *do* in

United States

an

way what Hitler did

Apocalyptic

Violence

Germany

Prussian

American

fascist

prefer

not

to

use

199

in a

way, The

would

His

is

poison the channels ofpublic

With a

the problem is

how

truth

public: but how

to

public into giving

his group more

more

They c:laim

but

would

every

guaranteed by

They

free

prise but are

for

and vested

toward

all their deceit is directed is

capture

so

the

of

and

of

market simultaneously.

may keep the com-

in

subjugation,1

Adams knew that resentments and bigotry lurk below the surface of all democratic societies and can be roused. under the right ditions. to promote a

creed that calls for the destruction of democracy, What is evil about these systems of intolerance and persecution is not the foot soldiers who carry out the crimes. but the organization that mobilizes and unleashes these dark passions, He worried that such a movement was, late in his life, again on the march, It was more sophisticated than in the past, more cleverly packaged. and this time without serious opposition.

The hatreds were again being stoked. The labor unions and pro-gressives who had been able to battle back in the 1930s were spent forces. The despair of tens of millions of Americans. unable to fmd manufacturing jobs or work that offered fair wages and benefits. would lead them. he knew. into the arms of these fanatical preachers, The rage of those abandoned by the economy. the fears and concerns of a beleaguered and insecure middle class.

and the numbing isolation that comes with the loss of community. would be the kindling for a dangerous mass movement, If these dispossessed were not reincorporated into

soci-

ety, *if* they eventually lost all hope of finding good, stable jobs and

opportunities for themselves and their children-in shan, the promise of a brighter future-the specter of American fascism would beset the nation. This despair. this loss of hope, this denial of a future, led the desperate into the arms of those who promised miracles and dreams of apocalyptic glory. Adams had seen it once. He knew what it looked like. He feared it was coming again.

Toward the close of the Second World War. Adams was asked to give a lecture about the Nazi faith to a large group of U.S.

Army officers preparing for service in the occupation army in many. He described the views expressed by the officers at the meeting as "an orgy of self-righteousness." Bigotry, in all its forms, had to be vigorously fought. He was Dot going to let this opportunity escape him. Adams wrote later:

This self-righteousness. I

ought

to *be*

I might

only in

morale of a

and that was not the

faith we were supposed to be fighting

Toward the end of

the

I

of

Nazi "faith,"

Nazi belief in

superiority of the

and in the inferiority

ofother

I also

the officers of

to

be

in

not *only*

the

and subversive

groups

in *the army of*

I asked

Army

to pose one or *two*

to be

by

man in *his*

First:

there any

between your

toward

Negro and the Jew,

the Nazi

toward other 'races'-

not the

in *brutality but a*

in

philoso-

phy?" "If there

an essential

I *said,*

the

might

a

of the Four

Freedoms

of

freedom of religion, freedom from

freedom from fear], but if there

no

differ-

ence between your race philosophy

that ofthe Nazis, a

be posed: "What are

fighting

201

I

when I *think of some of the responses* I *received.* I *was immediately*

questions like

think we

should

Negroes a

and

race?" "Haven't you been in

and

you

every Jew is a

like these

me for over an

I simply repeated my

again and

again: "How

you distinguish

yourself and a Nazi?"

have I

agony of

in a

Many of these Americans who could not distinguish between and Nazis

from "religious" homes, or they

to *be representatives (or even*

of the American

faith.

their faith was quite different from the faith hind

Four Freedoms. On the other hand, many of them doubt would have

possessing anything

would call

faith,

all of them, whatever their answers to *these spoke the faith that was in*

for

of them it was a

in white, gentile

in the

Adams, fmally, told us to watch closely what the Christian Right did to homosexuals. The Nazis had used "values" to launch state repression of opponents. Hider, days after he took power in 1933, imposed a ban on all homosexual and lesbian organizations. He ordered raids on places where homosexuals gathered, culminating in the ransacking of the Institute for

Science in Berlin and

the permanent exile of its director, Magnus Hirschfeld.

sands of volumes from the institute's library were tossed into a bonfire. The stripping of gay and lesbian Germans of their civil rights was largely cheered by the German churches. But this paign legitimized tactics, outside the law, that would soon be ployed

others. Adams said that homosexuals would also

be the first "social deviants" singled out and disempowered by the Christian Right. We would be the next.

Those arrayed

American democracy

waiting for a

moment to strike, a national crisis that will allow them to shred

the Constitution in the name of national security and strength.

And those in the movement often speak about such a moment with gleeful anticipation. Howard Phillips, a right-wing strategist who helped Jerry Falwell

the Moral Majority, has warned

Christians to be ready. "My friends, it is time to leave the 'political

on which the conservative movement has for too long booked passage," he told the Council for National Policy.

stead. it is our task to build an ark so that we can and will be ready

renew and restore our nation and our culture when God brings the tides (0

Debate with the radical Christian Right is useless. We cannot reach this movement. It does not want a dialogue. It is a movement based on emotion and cares nothing for rational thought and discussion. It is not mollified because John Kerry prays or Jimmy Carter teaches Sunday school. Naive attempts to reach out to the movement, to assure them that we, too, are Christian or we, too, care about moral values, are doomed. This movement is bent on our destruction. The attempts by many liberals to make peace would be humorous if the stakes were not so deadly. These dominionists hate the liberal, enlightened world formed by the Constitution, a world they blame for the debacle of their lives.

They have one goal-its destruction.

Alvin Toffler wrote that if you don't have a strategy you end up being part of someone else's strategy. There are isolated groups and individuals who, at some

are fighting back. The

nonviolent protests of the Reverend Mel White's Soulforce outside of Christian universities and service academies that discriminate against gays and lesbians are, according to the ideas of theologians such as Adams and

acts of faith. The clergy

and rabbis who have banded together in Ohio to challenge the tax-exempt status of the megachurches that promote "Christian"

candidates are performing an act of faith. The rulings of independent judges-such as the Republican-appointed Judge John E.

Jones III in Dover, Pennsylvania-who have prohibited the teaching of creationism in public schools because it is not science, are of faith. Cardinal Roger Mahony, the head of the Archdiocese of Los Angeles, the nation's largest, has called on Catholics to be prepared to defy the laws now being considered in Congress and backed by the Christian Right that make it a felony to shield or protect or offer support to illegal immigrants. Such civil disobedience would be an act of faith. The hate-crimes legislation now stalled in Congress because of bitter opposition from the Christian Right must be made law. Its passage would be an act of faith.

Programs to protect or establish community, to direct federal and state assistance to those truly left behind. those trapped in America's urban ghettos and blighted former manufacturing towns, are acts of faith. And the valiant struggle by former Vice President AI Gore and others to wake us up to the impending catastrophe that will beset us if we do not curb global warming is an act of faith. The accelerated rate of global warming could, within a decade, bring about epic destruction involving extreme weather, floods. droughts, epidemics and killer heat waves. To face this challenge, to do something about it, is to embrace a theology of hope, oftife. To do nothing. to paint these ecological catastrophes as messages from an angry

God rather than the folly of humankind, to believe blithely that global warming is a fiction and God alone determines human fate. is to accept this theology of despair, this radical evil. There are battles, big and small. that we can join. Many of them are being waged nearby, at our local school board. So much of maintaining a 'democracy is simply about showing up, and Adams felt that none of us had a right to profess our faith without this daily involvement in the life and well-being of our community, our nation and the planet Earth.

"Repeatedly," Adams told us,

heard anti-Nazis say, 'If only

1,000 of us in the late twenties had combined in heroic resistance. we could have stOpped Hider.'"

will

for

send.

Huck

and

on

sometimes

along,

harden

where

The

of Huckleberry

by Mark Twain ends with

Huck facing the moral dilemma we now face: whether to pay homage to a false moral code, one which has become law, or to damn ourselves in the eyes of many by opposing it. Here is Huck, faced with the choice of turning in his friend and escaped slave Jim, or living in defiance:

So *I was full of trouble, full as 1 could be: and didn't know what to do. At last I had an*

I says, I'll go

write the let-

if 1 *can pray. Why. it was*

the way

I felt as light as a

right straight

my *troubles all*

So *I got a*

of

and a

all

excited.

and set

and wrote:

Watson, your

nigger Jim

here two

and Mr. *Phelps has got him and*

up

reward ifyou

Finn.

I felt good and *all washed clean of sin for the first I had*

ever felt so in *my life.*

I knowed I could pray

But I didn't

do it *straight*

but laid the paper down and set there think-

how good it was all

so,

I come to

lost

going to hell. And

thinking. And

got to thinking over

trip down *the river;*

I see Jim

me, all the time in the day, and in the night-time, storms,

we a-floating

talking.

and singing. and

But somehow I couldn't seem to

no

to

me against

but only

other kind. I'd

see

watch on *top ofhis'n,*

of calling me, so

I could go *on*

and see

glad he was

I come

out of the fog;

I come to him again in the swamp,

up

the

was; and such-like

would al-

ways

honey, and pet

he could

offor

how *good*

always was; and at last I

time I saved him

telling

we had smallpox

and

was so

said 1was the

friend old

ever had

VIOlence

205

in the world,

the only one he's got

then I

to

see that

It was a close

I took it *up, and held* it in *my I was*

a-trembling,

I'd got to

things,

and I

it. I

a minute, sort of holding

breath,

and then says to *myself:*

right, then, I'Ugo to *heU"-and*

it *Up.IO*

The radical Christian Right calls for exclusion, cruelty and intolerance in the name of God. Its members do not commit evil for evil's sake. They

commit evil to make a better world. To attain this better world, they believe, some must suffer and be silenced, and at the end of time all those who oppose them must be destroyed. The worst suffering in human history has been carried out by those who preach such grand, utopian visions, those who seek to implant by force their narrow, particular version of goodness. This is true for all doctrines of personal salvation, from Christianity to ethnic nationalism to communism to fascism.

Dreams of a universal good create hells of persecution, suffering and slaughter. No human being could ever be virtuous enough to attain such dreams, and the Earth has swallowed millions of less victims in the vain pursuit of a new heaven and a new Earth.

Ironically, it is idealism that leads radical fundamentalists to strip human beings of their dignity and their sanctity and tum them into abstractions. Yet it is only by holding on to the sanctity of each individual, each human life, only by placing our faith in tiny, unheroic acts of compassion and kindness, that we survive as a community and as

human beings. These small acts of

kindness are deeply feared and subversive to these idealists, as the Russian novelist Vasily Grossman wrote in *Life and Fate.*

I have seen that it is not

who is

in *the*

against evil. but the

of

that is impotent in *the struggle*

against

The

of kindness, ofsenseless

and

before

man's

Human

the

battle

evil

kernel

beings

nu-

ity

sustain

is the secret of its immortality.

can never be

The

more stupid.

more

the more

it may

the

it

Evil *is impotent*

it. *The prophets,*

teachers.

political

are impotent

it. This dumb. blind love

meaning.

history is not

ofgood struggling to *overcome*

evil. It is a

fought by a great

struggling to crush a small

of human kindness. But if what is human in *human has not*

destroyed even now, then

will never

J 1

Plato and Aristotle defended slavery and often attacked Athenian democracy, but this does not mean they should not be read for their deep and penetrating insights intO political systems and ethics. Sigmund Freud understood little about love, viewed reli·

gion as infantile regression and viewed nearly every human motive through the lens of human sexuality. but at the same time Freud gave us one of the most powerful windows into and vocabularies for the workings of the

The Bible was wrinen by

merous people over hundreds of years with wide and often varying concerns, some of which were and are morally indefensible.

Within its pages, however, lie powerful passages that help illumi·

nate our lives and our place before the mystery of human exis·

tence. I, tOO, struggle, like the writers of the Bible, to understand.

I, too, often get it wrong. But it is the honesty and rigor of the search, the doubts and reverses, the mistakes and regrets, the abil·

to stand up again and keep trying that ultimately express faith.

This humility before the unknowable, the acceptance that there is much we will never understand, makes possible self·criticism, awareness, self-possession and self·reflection. They make possible compassion and acts of kindness. They allow us to see ourselves in the stranger, to reach out in solidarity to those who travel with us on this dusty, brief and often lonely road of life. This honesty and humility make possible a diverse and tolerant human community.

They

life and, in the midst of it all, impart hope.

Apocalyptic

found-

Violence

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I do not deny the right of Christian radicals to be, to believe and worship as they choose. But I will not engage in a dialogue with those who deny my right to be, who delegitimize my faith and denounce my struggle before God as worthless. All dialogue must include respect and tolerance for the beliefs, worth and dignity of others, including those outside the nation and the faith. When this respect is denied, this clash of ideologies ceases to be merely a difference of opinion and becomes a fight for survival. This movement seeks, in the name of Christianity and American democracy, to destroy that which it claims to defend. I do not believe that America will inevitably become a fascist state or that the Christian Right is the Nazi Party. But I do believe that the radical Christian Right is a sworn and potent enemy of the open society. Its ideology bears within it the tenets of a Christian fascism. In the event of a crisis, in the event of another catastrophic terrorist attack, an economic meltdown or huge environmental disaster, the movement stands poised to manipulate fear and chaos ruthlessly and reshape America in ways that have not been seen since the nation's ing. All Americans-not only those of faith-who care about our open society must learn to speak about this movement with a new vocabulary, to give up passivity, to challenge aggressively this movement's deluded appropriation of Christianity and to do everything possible to defend tolerance. The attacks by this movement on the rights and beliefs of Muslims, Jews, immigrants, gays, lesbians, women, scholars, scientists, those they dismiss as "nominal Christians," and those they brand with the curse of "secular humanist" are an attack on all of us, on our values, our freedoms and ultimately our democracy. Tolerance is a virtue, but tolerance coupled with passivity is a vice.

One:

The

Open

Society

Enemies

Press,

from

Revised

sion

as

Reverend

Credo

Knox,

Richard

Dreams

Glory:

The

Sources

Apocalyptic

Terror

VE

The

Heart

Little

Press

Memoriam

stanza

The

Dramatic

American

History

(New

Notes

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of

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director of Americans United for the Separation of Church and State, in a Pew forum titled "The Faith-Based Initiative Years Later: Examining Its Potential, Progress and Problems, March 5, 2003, Washington. DC, http://pewforurn.orgleventslindex

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30. "American Values: The Triumph of the Religious Right," *Economist,* November II, 2004, http://www.economist.comlprinteditionl

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31. MSNBC.com, "Exit Polls-President," hnp://www.msnbc.msn.coml

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32. President Bush created the Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives by executive order on January 29, 2001, just nine days after his inauguration. Congress has not passed legislation allowing for faith-based initiatives, so President Bush has repeatedly used executive orders to push the policy through. See "Executive Orders,"

Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives, http://www.white

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2006, President Bush signed the Deficit Reduction Act of 2005, reauthorizing

refonn for another five *years* and extending the "charitable choice" policy, which allows faith-based groups to continue receiving funding "without altering their religious identities or

their hiring practices." See "Fact Sheet: Compassion in Action: Producing Real Results for Americans Most in Need," Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives, http://www.white

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Highlights

Re-

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governmentlfbcVfinatreport_

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